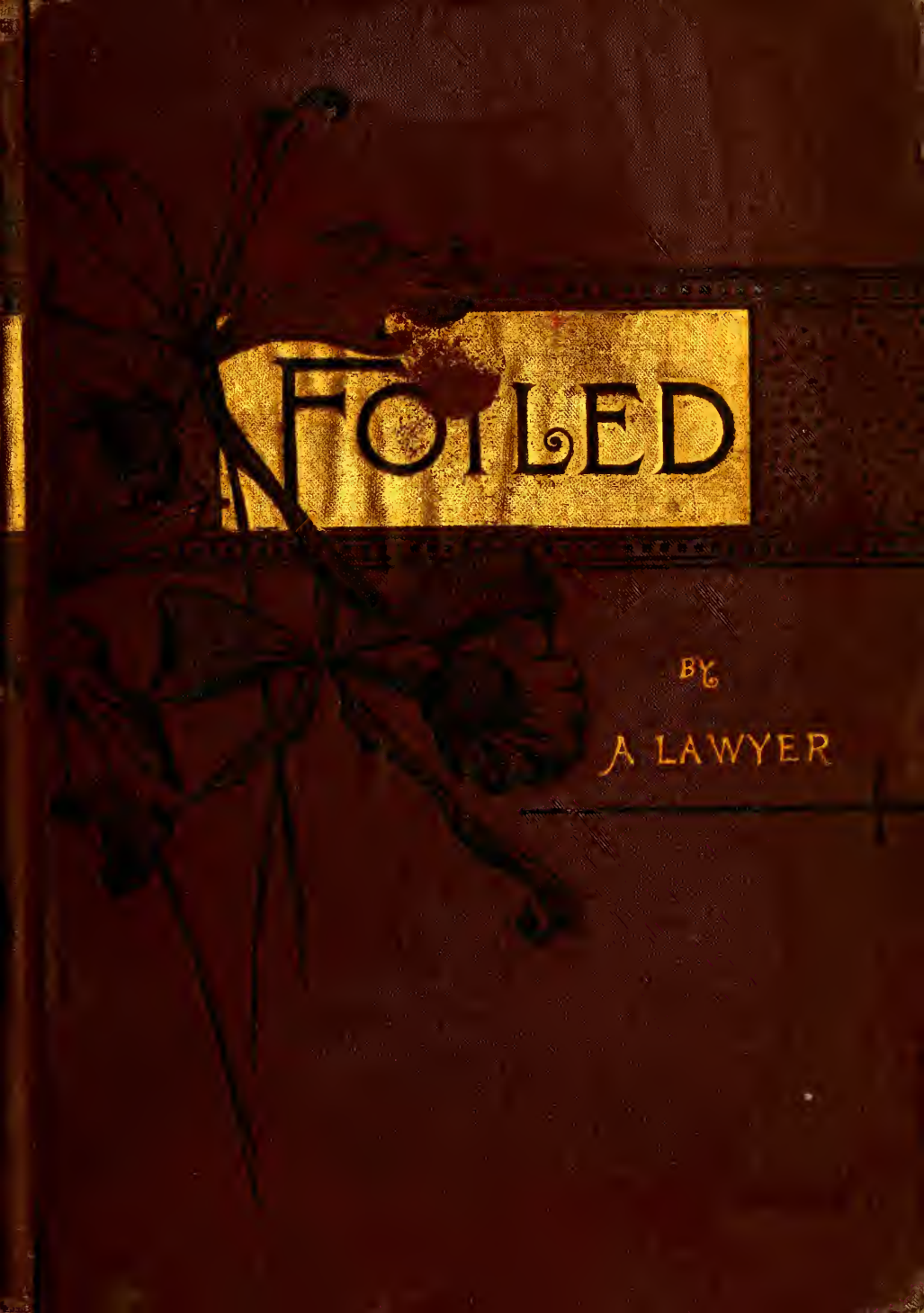


The book cover is a deep, mottled brown with a fine, leather-like texture. A horizontal band of gold leaf is positioned in the upper-middle section, containing the title. To the left of this band, a dark, stylized floral or vine-like illustration extends vertically. The title 'FOILED' is printed in a large, black, serif font with decorative flourishes on the letters 'F' and 'D'.

# FOILED

BY  
A LAWYER

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# FOILED

BY

A LAWYER.

A STORY OF CHICAGO.

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CHICAGO:  
CLARK & LONGLEY, PRINTERS.  
1885.





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## PREFACE.

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Were the author to use the exact words of the now lamented Victor Hugo, when in a private letter referring to "*Les Misérables*," he wrote: "My book was written to clear up and combat prejudices in France, England, and the whole world," he could not more clearly express his own object in presenting "*FOILED*."

The foremost character is the plausible and unscrupulous Mrs. Graham, who by reason of her excellent judgment of human nature and quick perception of weak points in others, makes use of every advantage thus gained to crush and humiliate the mild and gentle Edith, who finds that among all her relatives and friends, Mrs. Wallingford is the only one who does not desert her to aid Mrs. Graham. She fathoms the mysterious charm that protects Mrs. Graham, and renders Edith much valuable aid. Even Arthur is for a time completely under Mrs. Graham's influence, but at last, almost by accident, her true character is revealed to him, he then turns upon

her, and by means of the law, by which Mrs. Graham has so cruelly oppressed Edith, he causes her complete overthrow.

The faithless friends and Mr. Skinner, the wily, unscrupulous lawyer, all lend their aid to Mrs. Graham in her efforts to oppress and rob Edith, while many otherwise innocent persons, by their willing belief of all that Mrs. Graham says are caused to aid her, and desert the object of her hatred.

Of the fidelity to nature with which the author has drawn the characters, the reader must be the judge. The picture has been painted and the author steps back to allow his readers to judge of the character of his work.

If their decision be that it fails in all except that it will cause them to remember that “no just judge pronounces a verdict without first hearing both sides,” and they be induced thereby to more closely follow this course, he will be content, for it will have accomplished the aim and object of the

AUTHOR.



## CHAPTER I.

### ARTHUR GAINS HIS FIRST VICTORY.

“Father, will you send me to college?”

Mr. Howard sat before the glowing grate, in the comfortable sitting room of his residence, reading the evening paper. His wife and two daughters, engaged with their sewing and fancy work, were sitting in a little circle by themselves.

Arthur, the only son, and pride of his mother's heart, had just entered his nineteenth year, and though full of the enthusiasm of youth, yet he always treated his mother and sisters with the respect and attention of a true knight. With a high sense of honor, which was largely due to the wise counsel of his mother, he often displayed a knowledge of true politeness that, had it not seemed intuitive with him, would have appeared to be far in advance of his years. In other respects Arthur Howard was not different from his schoolmates.

Fondly he had cherished the hope that some day he might enter college; these hopes he had confided to his mother, meeting with her hearty approval and help. Between them it had been decided that he should, on this evening, mention his plans to his father and ask his con-

sent. He had taken a position facing him, and with one arm resting upon the mantel, was watching the effect of his words.

His mother, seemingly busied with her work, eagerly awaited the reply that would blast forever the most cherished hopes of her dear boy, or ripen them into their full fruition.

Slowly the old gentleman lowered his paper, and looking at his son, said :

“ So you want to go to college, do you ? And what, pray, has put that notion into your head ? Are you not content to begin as your father did ; or do you think that you must go to college in order to become a gentleman, and be one of the drinking, smoking, and gambling set that learn all the fashionable vices, and forget what little education is given them in our public schools ? I dare say that you want to become educated because you believe that only gentlemen of this kind enter the higher walks of life ; to be educated that you may look upon honest labor as a disgrace ; and finally return home to be supported in idleness while you improve your time in perfecting the vices thus learned. To college ? No ! I would much rather see you enter the machine shop, or any other home of honest labor, and there improve your mind while strengthening your body. The best citizens, the most successful business men, the men of wealth to-day, are those who have risen from the ranks of labor, with bodies strong enough to bear the strain and worry of business cares. In this country we acknowledge and respect this class of men. They are the ones to pattern after ; take their course, and if man-

hood is desired by you, follow them. The noted forgers, the embezzlers, and the men who make commercial honor a rarity, are not recruited from this class."

Arthur listened anxiously, trusting that he might find some slight encouragement to hope for aid ; but when his father finished speaking, he saw there was but little hope of his plans finding favor in his eyes. But his heart had been so long set upon going to college, that, with all the discouraging words his father had spoken, he found it hard to believe that his cause was hopeless ; and so, in a voice from which all the boyish enthusiasm had gone, he said :

"But, father, I would study so hard, and try to avoid the vices, if you would only let me go."

"You have my answer," replied Mr. Howard, decisively, "and it is no longer necessary to parley over it. Never, by my consent or aid, shall a son of mine enter college."

Arthur could no longer remain in doubt. He now saw his cherished hopes crushed at one fell blow, and that his motives had been most sadly misjudged. He felt the cruel injustice of his father's words ; his pride and self-respect rebelled ; and, as he stood before his father, his lips quivering with the intensity of his feelings, he said :

"If I cannot go with your aid, I will go without it ; and I will prove to you that at least one boy can enter college and still retain his manhood." Then, turning toward his mother, and seeing tears glistening in her eyes, his overwrought feelings gained the mastery, and dashing up to his room he gave way to a flood of passionate tears. Within him his emotions swayed and bent his form, as does the

mountain storm the younger trees of the forest, only to find them the deeper rooted at its next attack. So Arthur, after the first outburst, found himself calm and calculating; the schoolboy had given way to the resistless approach of manhood.

The boy of to-day is the young man of to-morrow; nor does this change always take place by slow degrees. Some casual event may start the backward child into full and vigorous youth.

This change had taken place in Arthur. The words uttered by his father had started him from the timid boy, who shuddered at the thought of leaving home and going out in the world to meet the strange faces and ways of his college associates, to the young man who stood before his father and declared his purpose to aid himself. The things that had troubled him before, he now swept aside like the shadows that they were, and turned boldly to the sterner work before him. But this work was not so easily disposed of; and realizing this, he roused himself, almost in anger at his tears, and deliberately surveyed the course he had marked out. Gradually he felt his spirits revive. Every move and thought was now bent upon one aim—success. How could it be accomplished? He thought of many plans that might help him, but, one after another, they were all cast aside. At last he remembered that he had often heard his father speak of Mr. Reynolds and his wonderful success in the large commercial interests in which he was engaged in the great city of Chicago. “He is a firm friend of father’s,” thought Arthur, “and if I could only enter his store I would at least be on the road to success.”

With Arthur, to think was to act ; his impulsive nature did not admit of his doing otherwise ; and as this plan seemed full of promise, he at once drew his writing desk upon his knee, and wrote a plain, boyish letter, in which he stated his desire to attend college, and, as his father declined to assist him, that he must find employment by which he could pay his expenses, and desired to know if he could be given a position in his store, with the privilege of study and recitation at the college.

As he finished writing, he heard a knock at his door ; and well knowing it to be his mother, whose sympathies he knew were with him, he welcomed her in and laid before her his plans, asking her advice. She, poor mother, knowing better how to smooth care away by caresses than by giving advice on matters like these, could only say : “I hope you will be successful.”

Mr. Howard found it no easy matter to forget his conversation with Arthur. He had not foreseen the effect that his words and manner would have upon him. He supposed that it, like many another notion, would soon be forgotten when once he had said no. But Arthur’s words had left their impression, and he now felt that he had been needlessly harsh in his reply.

So, when Arthur again entered the room, Mr Howard called him to his side, and then, seeing the letter in his hand, asked : “To whom have you been writing?”

In reply, Arthur simply handed him the letter, making no further answer.

It was Mr. Howard’s intention to simply open the conversation in this way, and then pour a little balm upon the

wounded spirits of his son ; but when he saw the address on Arthur's letter, he forgot his former intention in his anxiety to know what the sending of the letter meant, and looking up at Arthur, he asked :

“ May I see what you have written ? ”

“ Certainly,” replied Arthur, leaning forward and breaking the seal.

Mr. Howard's expression changed from one of curiosity to one of puzzled concern as he read the letter ; and then, having finished reading it, said :

“ Arthur, do you know that I am very much inclined to endorse this letter with my approval ? When you spoke to me of going to college, I had in mind the average young man of to-day, whose sole aim is to have a good time, live fast, and come home with by no means the proper education to fit him for the stern realities of life. I now find that your aim is different ; and in so far as it is, you have my best wishes. Any young man who enters college with the purpose of gaining knowledge to be used and appreciated as it must be by one who works his way through, will be able to take care of himself afterward, and, good health permitting, will make his mark among men.”

Mr. Howard then wrote under Arthur's signature—

“ I am in full sympathy with Arthur's plan. Any opportunity given him in furtherance of it will be appreciated by yours,  
Very truly, GILBERT HOWARD.”

Arthur then sealed his letter and mailed it.

Of this scene Mrs. Howard had not been an uninterested spectator, and willingly listened as her husband turned toward her and said :

“ I was completely dumfounded when Arthur declared

he would go. He has it in him to make a successful man. Courage is on all hands recognized as an essential of high character ; and I have noticed with pleasure that Arthur is always able to say no, and stand by it, when he believes he is right. No great genius was ever without some mixture of madness, nor can anything grand or superior to the voice of common mortals be spoken except by the agitated soul ; and, if I mistake not, Arthur was considerably agitated when he said—‘I will prove to you that at least one boy can enter college and still retain his manhood.’ And the young rascal means it, too ; for he has already written a letter applying for a situation. O, how little we realize that our children may grow away from us more and more, year by year, because we insist on being guardians more than companions !”

Mrs. Howard noticed with joy what seemed to her as the softening of her husband toward Arthur’s desire to attend college, and said, quietly:

“You know he will go any way; why, then, would it not be better to send him as a gentleman’s son and in a creditable way?”

“I would not do it for the world !” hastily interrupted Mr. Howard. “Can you not see that it is the struggle with the world that is to separate the wheat from the chaff,—the bearing of hardships of his own choosing that will toughen him so that he can successfully fight his way through where others, reared as you suggest, will droop and fall by the way ? No ! Let him do as he now intends, and when he comes back, you will find that he has received the experience he needs to make him a son that we can well be proud of.”



"I trust that you are right, my dear," replied Mrs. Howard ; "but be careful that discouragement does not follow too great a strain."

"O, no fear of that !" responded Mr. Howard ; "care never kills the young."

To Arthur, the few days following were filled with alternating doubt and hope. One minute he would be urging the postman to look once more, and see if he had not overlooked his letter ; the next, he would be figuring just the hour that his letter arrived, and the last possible moment that it should take the answer to reach him. But, all unconscious of its precious burden, the mail in due time brought him an answer ; and when at last the long-looked-for letter was in his hand, he hardly dared to open it, for fear that it might bring him only disappointment ; but, summoning all his courage, he opened it, and seeing the word "come," he rushed into the house, and throwing his arms around his mother, cried :

"It's all right, mother ; it's all right !"

"What's all right, Arthur ?" inquired Mrs. Howard, with gentle, reproving quietness. "Have you heard from Mr. Reynolds ?"

"Read that and see !" and Arthur, half beside himself with joy, handed her the letter.

Mrs. Howard opened the letter and read the short but welcome tidings :

"Yours at hand. In reply, will say, come as soon as you please, and stay as long you please.

"Respectfully yours,

"LAWRENCE REYNOLDS."

"You don't seem to be pleased with the letter," said

Arthur, as he noticed a shade of sadness where he had expected only smiles of pleasure.

Mrs. Howard looked up at her boy, the tears glistening in her eyes, as she quietly said :

“When you are gone, Arthur, I shall sadly miss you ; but I am glad that you can go, for all that.”

“O, I’ll write you every blessed day, and then the time won’t seem long,” replied Arthur, as he danced about the room.

This brought a smile to Mrs. Howard’s face, and she again assumed her motherly cares and began the preparations to speed the parting guest, e’en though her heart said stay.

And so, with the aid of his sisters, short work was made of getting him ready to start. His trunk was none too large, but it contained all his possessions. When he was ready his father gave him a few dollars with which to pay his expenses until the first money he earned was paid him, his mother adding her mite by slipping into his hand a small gold coin, as she bid him good bye, at the same time handing him a note, saying: “There, Arthur, is the address of valued friends who live in the city, and I hope you will call and see them.”

Arthur carefully placed the note in his pocket, and was soon whirling on to the city of his adoption.

## CHAPTER II.

### BERTHA'S OATH OF ALLEGIANCE.

Stewart Graham sat reading in his elegantly furnished library, which as you enter impresses you with a sense of genial whole-heartedness in all its surroundings, to no one part of which could it be said to entirely belong. Every piece of decoration partook of this character, and yet seemed necessary to completeness. Some of the pieces of furniture had filled an honored place in the homes of his ancestors, many generations before; yet the elegant carving or self-apparent handiwork of a master in art was sufficient to give them an honored place in his home. The works of the best known authors in literature, science and art were found upon the shelves of his library, "where were treasured up for his daily use and delectation riches which increase by being consumed and pleasures that never cloy." The center of the handsome bay that occupied one side of the room revealed an aquarium filled with gold fish, on either side of which were living plants, whose healthy growth gave evidence of the care bestowed upon them, while in the grate a cheerful fire burned and shed its warmth throughout the room. A casual observer might take Mr. Graham to be a man of forty-five, but a closer

observation would reveal that he was nearer sixty. While in his youth a man of good form, he was now approaching that condition of portly habit so common to men of his age, yet he retained his sprightly step and cheery voice.

“No chronic torture racked his aged limb,  
For luxury and sloth had nourished none for him.”

The best of his years he had spent in active business life, the fruits of which he was now enjoying in ease and comfort. Of him you could say, with Goldsmith :

“How blest is he who crowns in shades like these  
A youth of labor with an age of ease.”

Were you to call upon business, you would find that he retained the crisp, decisive diction so common to commercial men of his day, yet you would readily recognize in him the perfect gentlemen ; if a man of the world, you would feel perfectly at ease in his presence, and when your business was at an end that it was time to take your leave. If you met him socially and he grasped your hand, you would recognize in him a friend and brother ; and though you knew him many years, you might never hear him mention his religious faith, yet you would never doubt that he was one of God’s noblemen. He believed with Cowper, that—

“Religion does not censure or exclude  
Unnumbered pleasures harmlessly pursued.”

With him your kindly acts were always remembered. Confiding, almost to a fault, he trusts until deceived ; but once deceived, he never trusts again. Such a man was Stewart Graham. A few years before the opening of our story he had lost the early partner of his joys, and had but recently brought to his home his second wife.

Sitting beside him, in attire fitly becoming her sur-

roundings, is the second Mrs. Graham. As she rises to meet you, her commanding appearance rivets your attention. Her every motion reveals the perfected actress; her figure displays to excellent advantage the rich and elegant costume she wears. Being of full habit, you would be inclined to call her stout, were it not that this appearance is so well hidden by her height as not to offend the eye. Her head is well supported by a neck a little too strong in outline, the which, however, would escape your notice were it not that the heavy, sensuous lips and cold, gray eyes are too suggestive of a will and self-reliance that has never been broken, and makes you despair of mercy at her hands. In full, a woman that charms you, you know not whether by fear or admiration. At the sound of her voice the spell is broken, and you feel that no ordinary woman stands before you. Every word she utters is well chosen and falls with silvery accent upon your ears. The force and bearing of every word is measured as she speaks it; and as the conversation becomes more interesting, you feel the power of her influence upon you. Her words are almost realized before she utters them; and as she unfolds the hidden mysteries of her mind, she carries you along a willing captive to her thoughts and words. Nor is this feeling transitory. You feel their power even after you have left her presence. The hidden stores of her knowledge, and the correctness of her judgment of human nature, is a source of constant surprise; and you leave her presence fully impressed with the fact that you have met a remarkable woman.

Near her sits Bertha Locke, Mrs. Graham's most cher-

ished friend and companion. She is not possessed of a handsome face, and a slight stooping at the shoulders detracts from what might otherwise have been a fair figure. The poverty of her parents, who lived in the small village of Exeter, made it necessary for her to support herself by teaching in the village school, where then the now prosperous Mrs. Graham was principal. The acquaintance thus formed had ripened into a friendship that gave early promise of being lasting. Her hard and cheerless life had made its impression on her disposition, and yet such was the perfect mastery of Mrs. Graham over her that in her presence Bertha always displayed an exterior unbroken by storms. In Mrs. Graham's hands Bertha was but a willing tool.

The village of Exeter was situated on the shores of a beautiful lake, which gave it such rare advantages for boating and fishing as to soon bring it into prominence as a most inviting summer resort for the wealthy families of the city. It was here that Stewart Graham first met his second wife, while he was seeking rest and quiet; and it was not long after their marriage that a pressing invitation was sent by Mrs. Graham to Bertha to visit her in her new home.

Bertha, greatly desiring to perfect herself in drawing and painting, willingly availed herself of the opportunity thus afforded her. Once there, Mrs. Graham had no intention that she should soon leave her house; and when Mr. Graham expressed his surprise at her long-continued stay, she informed him that she found her a very pleasant companion and had invited her to remain until her studies had

been completed, to which he made no objection, so that Bertha soon became a recognized member of his family.

Mr. Graham had grown weary of reading, and, laying his book aside, he asked : " Where is Edith to-night ? "

" I am sure I do not know," replied Mrs. Graham, " but suppose that she is in her room, or with the servants ; she is in one or the other place most of her time."

" Will you call her in ? I should like to see her."

Mrs. Graham touched the bell, and said to the servant answering : " Tell Miss Edith her father desires to see her."

" Did you want me, father ? " A fair young girl, rosy cheeked, with dark brown eyes, stood at the open door, a shade of wistful uncertainty upon her fair face.

" Yes, daughter," replied Mr. Graham. " I thought, as I was tired, that if you were not busy you could read to me."

Edith quickly drew a chair near him, and placing her feet upon the fender of the grate, read the heavy scientific articles, one after the other, until Mrs. Graham, with a beckoning nod to Bertha, quietly arose and left the room, followed shortly afterward by Bertha.

When they were alone, Mr. Graham turned to Edith and said :

" Put down the book, daughter, I want to talk with you. I notice that you stay in your room a great deal of late and I do not see you. Why is this ? "

For some little time Edith did not reply. Then, in a low voice, her eyes fastened on the glowing coals, she said :

" I have tried to overcome my dislike for Mrs. Graham.



It was a hard struggle ; and, as you know, I have had to leave the room several times within the last few weeks or break down in a crying spell, because of her remarks to me ; and yet it is more the way in which she says it than in what she says that makes her words cut so deep. I suppose that I am too sensitive, and therefore always unprepared to meet her cutting remarks. So I made a firm resolve to overcome this sensitiveness, and I think I could have succeeded at last, were it not that when she found that I was beginning to disregard her manner, and that it did not affect me as before, the thought seemed to madden her, and she flew at me in a terrible rage, and of course I broke down completely ; but I was determined I would not leave the room, and I should not have done so were it not that, after abusing me in the way she had, she heaped abuse upon my dead mother, calling her a weak-minded fool, that had neglected her duty in not properly bringing me up, but leaving me upon her hands to be a shame and disgrace to her. What more she said I do not know, for this I felt I could not stand, and so in dismay I fled from the room. She may ill treat me and I will try and stand it for your sake. But when this woman, who is now reaping the benefit of my mother's years of toil, enters the home made desolate by her death in order that she may cast odium upon her name, it is more than I can stand even for you. No, no ! The memory of my mother is too sacred. I concluded, therefore, that the best way was for me to stay in my room ; once in a while, when too lonesome, going down with the servants for a breathing spell."

Mr. Graham's spectacles had fallen to the floor, his cheeks

were wet with tears, his face, covered with his hand, could not be seen. He was bearing his cross with heroism. Edith sat gazing fixedly into the fire, with a longing, wistful look. No word escaped her lips; yet who doubts that her thoughts were of that mother, more needed now than when first born;—that mother by whose presence a child would have been comforted, a home made happy!

O, what a picture! Wealth and luxury abounding, on every hand ease and comfort, yet the father and daughter mourn in silence the departed mother and wife! The father's thoughts return to the day when he first called her wife,—their little home,—the pride of the day when Edith was born,—the day of her death; and now, the day of her being reviled in his house and by his wife! Do you not say that he was a brave man that held his peace under these afflictions? The daughter struggling with that inward cry of mamma! mamma!—the child's cry; for we are all children in our deepest affliction.

"They thus passed over the white sands and between the rocks, silent as their shadows."

At last Edith arose, and not wishing to disturb her father's reveries, silently bent over him, kissed his brow and retired to her room. Late into the night Stewart Graham sat in the same unaltered position, where—

"With silence as their benediction, God's angels came,

Where in the shadow of his great affliction his soul sat dumb."

Mrs. Graham had chosen the time while Edith was reading to her father to have a talk with Bertha on a subject that had long been the burden of her mind; so when she passed from the library into the sitting-room she seated herself, and motioning Bertha to a seat by her side, said:

“You are, no doubt, aware that when I married Mr. Graham we were both too old to be deluded with the idea that it was what is commonly called a love match, and you can readily see that as a school teacher I had but little prospect of making a fortune for myself; so that when Stewart Graham offered me his hand and fortune, the picture of his elegant home and surroundings, with ease and comfort for the rest of my life, was too inviting for me to refuse. I accepted his offer, not that it was the only one at my disposal, but looking at them all in a business light, and finding the advantage of wealth was on his side, I married him. There was no question of love. I simply married him for a home. Now, Bertha, I have made a confidant of you in this matter, and I want you to look about you and see the advantages of this position,—the social standing, the power to rise to the height of one’s greatest ambition, to be able to sway society at the waving of your hand, with the homes of our best families open to you,—and with all this in mind, tell me, would you like to share it?”

“I need not long consider it,” quickly replied Bertha; “of course I would. I would feel that my aim in life was accomplished were I only to approach it. You do not need to tell me the advantages of your position, I know them only too well. Have not I had to struggle for my daily bread, and do I not know what the difference is between that and the position you hold? But why torture me with such thoughts?—they only worry me, they are too unreal, too far removed.”

“Not too unreal if I offer them, are they?” inquiringly

answered Mrs. Graham, who eagerly watched her face to see the effect of her words ; and though Bertha hesitated a moment before she again replied, Mrs. Graham felt sure her object was accomplished when she saw the look of gloomy despair on Bertha's face give way to one of uncertainty and finally of ecstatic joy.

“ No,—” doubtfully answered Bertha.

“ Well, I do offer it ; do you accept ? ”

“ I do.”

“ On any terms ? ”

“ Yes, on any terms,” replied Bertha, firmly.

“ Well, I must give you credit for more sense than most women have,” replied Mrs. Graham. “ But my terms are very easy : you must become the adopted daughter of Stewart Graham.”

“ I hardly understand you,” replied Bertha, half affrighted at the boldness of Mrs. Graham's proposition.

“ You must become the adopted daughter of Stewart Graham ! ” answered Mrs. Graham, decisively.

“ But how can I ? ” persisted Bertha.

“ Leave that to me,” said Mrs. Graham, confidently.

“ When my plans are ready I will show you the way. Until then, act well your part and all will be well.”

## CHAPTER III.

### THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

After riding all night, Arthur, early the next morning, arrived at his destination. He had a general idea of the direction he should take, but found it necessary to make some inquiries, and stepping up to one of the men who were loitering about a building that was just being erected, he asked :

“Can you tell me where I can find the store of Reynolds, Chalmers & Co.?”

“Begorra! and I can’t,” replied the Irishman, for such he proved to be. “And, faith, me lad, what street might it be on?”

Arthur gave him the address, when he quickly replied :

“Ah! yis; an’ I’m goin’ right by there. Come with me and I’ll show ye’s where it is.”

Arthur hesitated a moment, for he remembered that he had often read of strangers in a great city being misled by sharpers, who were ever on the alert to take advantage of and rob them. The ready willingness of this man to accompany him looked suspicious, and he determined he would defeat him if such was his object, so he said:

“If you will tell me how I should go I am sure I can find my way.”

“Shure,” an’ I’ll not be after hurting ye’s. Come along, an ye’s can read the sign, and if ye’s loike it then ye’s can go in.”

This settled the matter with Arthur, and he willingly followed his lead.

“An’ so ye’s thought I wos wan of thim sharp fellers what was a tryin’ to rope ye’s in, did yer?” began his companion as they rapidly walked along.

“Well, I hardly knew,” replied Arthur, who now saw that his hesitation was fully understood by his companion.

“Well, now, me lad, whin ye’s come across wan of thim fellers he want be drissed in clothes loike thim,”—looking deprecatingly down at his well worn clothes ;—but ye’s will think ye’s hav cum acrost wan of the foinest gints in the land. He’ll be drissed to kill, and av as glib a tongue in his head as iver ye’s heard. But ye’r want to look sharp to ye’r pockets while he’s around.”

“O, yes,” replied Arthur, “I have heard of them.”

“An ye’s thought because I hed me wurkin’ clothes on that I was a lookin’ for kids like ye! Well, it only shows that ye’s don’t know much about this town!”

Arthur felt chagrined at his mistake, and said, consolingly: “But your clothes make no difference to me, for I believe a man can wear good clothes and not be a gentleman.”

“O, that’s all right, me lad! But, say, air ye’s goin’ to wurk fur them folks where yer goin’?”

“Yes,” replied Arthur, with pardonable pride, “I have a place there”

“Well, good luck to ye’s! Now, here we are, and there’s

the sign ; be sure an' read it before ye's go in," and his Irish friend walked on, chuckling to himself at Arthur's mistake.

Years afterward, when he remembered how he had mistaken his friend for a city sharper, Arthur could not repress a smile.

Mr. Reynolds met Arthur very kindly, and after a few minutes' conversation placed him in charge of the head of the department to which he had been assigned. Here he rapidly acquired the necessary knowledge to make him efficient in his work, and after making his arrangements at the college, soon settled into a routine of labor that so thoroughly occupied his time and thoughts that weeks rolled into months without his appreciation of it, until the winter had passed, and with it the completion of his first course at college. He was now carrying on his studies preparatory to the struggle that must come with his next year's course, when he hoped, if possible, to graduate. Unknown to Arthur, he had been carefully watched by Mr. Reynolds, who quickly recognized the faithfulness with which he performed his duties ; as a result of which, at the close of his college term, he was given a position in Mr. Reynold's office, where his work was much lighter but required great care. He was thus occupied, on a pleasant summer's day, when his attention was attracted by a handsome carriage stopping before the door, and, looking up from his work, he was greatly surprised to see his father and mother alight, and, escorted by a pleasant-faced gentleman, make their way toward the office.

" Well, mother, you have surprised me this time, sure !" exclaimed Arthur, as he met her at the door.



"We wanted to know how you were situated, and took this way of finding out," replied Mrs. Howard; and then, turning to the gentleman that accompanied them, she said: "Mr. Graham, this is my son Arthur; Arthur, this is Mr. Graham, at whose house we are stopping."

"I feel that I know you pretty well already," replied Mr. Graham, quietly, as he held Arthur's hand. "Your mother has told me of your ambition, and I trust for her sake you will succeed."

"Thank you," replied Arthur, "I intend to if it is possible."

"And now, in accordance with our agreement," said Mr. Graham, turning towards Mrs. Howard, "I will leave you with Arthur and will call for you on my return." He then entered his carriage and was rapidly driven away.

Mr. Howard had sought his old friend and Arthur's employer, thus leaving him and his mother alone.

"So that was Mr. Graham, was it?" queried Arthur.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Howard, "and I find that you have not followed my advice and called on them. I wonder you have not felt the need of counsel, and that you were not lonesome for want of home influences."

"Had I known him as I feel I do now, I certainly should have called," replied Arthur, earnestly; "but when I found the house and saw the elegant surroundings, I could not muster sufficient courage to go in; besides, my empty pockets and my position gave me good reason to believe that my company would be out of place."

"Were you rich or poor, it would have but little weight with Stewart Graham," quietly replied Mrs. Howard.

“Well, then, he is different from many others,” replied Arthur, positively. “Money is what tells with most of them.”

“Not with the best of them, my son. But let me change the subject long enough to say that we are all to take tea at Mr. Graham’s house this evening. Mr. Graham will call for us in a few minutes, and you are to come as soon as you can get away.”

“Arthur,” said Mr. Howard, joining them, “I am pleased to hear from Mr. Reynolds that you have done so well. He evidently takes quite an interest in you, and I trust his friendship will not be misplaced.”

“He never hinted to me that he was pleased,” replied Arthur; “I couldn’t tell whether I pleased him or not.”

“No,” replied Mr. Howard, earnestly, “he is a man of few words, and neither lauds nor censures; but he knows what is going on, for all that.”

“Well, I’m pleased to know that he is satisfied with me,” replied Arthur, with a grateful smile; “but sometimes a little praise would help amazingly.”

“Here is Mr. Graham,” said Mrs. Howard, as the carriage drew up to the door. “Now, Arthur, good bye, and be sure and come.”

Arthur followed them to the carriage, and when they were seated, Mr. Graham turned to him and said:

“Your mother has delivered you our invitation, has she not?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Arthur.

“Well, you must be sure and come.”

“I’ll be there, sure,” replied Arthur; and as he stood looking after them as they were being driven away, he

thought—"What a fine old gentleman he is ! One would almost think his pleasure depended upon my coming, and yet I know it was only for my sake that he said it ; whether I went or not could make no difference to him."

That evening as Arthur entered the spacious parlors of Mr. Graham's residence, his eyes at one rapid glance took in the elegant surroundings, while his mother noticed with pleasure the ease with which he bore himself while being introduced to the two young ladies.

"We are greatly pleased to have you with us," was Mrs. Graham's courteous salutation ; "and as your father and mother must spare you for a time, I will commit you to the tender mercies of Edith and Bertha. It will be two against one, I admit ; but you will no doubt be able to defend yourself even against such odds."

Since it had first been announced to them that Arthur was coming, Edith and Bertha awaited the time with some curiosity. The glowing accounts of him that had been given them by his mother, in her enthusiasm and love for him, were sufficient to awaken in them a desire to see what he was in reality. Had Arthur known of this, he would indeed have been sore dismayed ; but, happily, he did not.

"Your mother pays me a high compliment, I assure you," said Arthur, as he seated himself near the young ladies ; "but I fear she underestimates your accomplishments."

"Or, possibly, appreciates yours," answered Bertha.

"O, Bertha ! how unkind to suppose that any one could appreciate his ability with only two minutes' conversation!" said Edith, laughingly.

"I believe," said Arthur, "that it is an acknowledged

fact that there is a vast difference in the perceptive faculties of different persons."

"Then, as you think us dull, we must ask for more time," retorted Bertha.

"Were I to admit that you were dull, the which I do not," replied Arthur, with a half malicious smile, "I still think that two minutes would give you ample time, and I would be fortunate indeed if you did not have some time to spare, in which to find out much that I do not know."

"There, that's just like you men!" said Bertha, "always pretending you do not know much; but I dare say it would be dangerous for others to tell you so."

"There are always two sides to a question," replied Arthur, laughing, "and I prefer to take this side, that's all."

"Well, that was well turned," said Edith, her eyes twinkling merrily; "but tell us, is it not more easy to make an argument on the side with which you believe?"

"And is not that the reason I take this side?" inquired Arthur.

"O, but that is begging the question!" said Bertha. "But come, let us adjourn to the tea table."

"Your father tells me that you are attending college," said Mr. Graham to Arthur, as they were all seated at the table, "and that you are paying your way by working in Mr. Reynold's store,—don't you find that a pretty big undertaking?"

"I do," replied Arthur, "but not an unpleasant one. It occupies my time and thoughts so completely as to make the days pass very rapidly."

“So we have been talking to a young man just from college!” interposed Edith; “no doubt we have greatly shocked him with our ignorance.”

“O, these college boys don’t know everything, Edith,” replied Mr. Howard. “Some of them think they do, but they strike wide of the mark quite often.”

“That is what I have been trying to make Miss Edith and Bertha understand,” replied Arthur, laughingly.

“Your trouble, no doubt, arose from the fact that you had no faith in your arguments,” answered Mr. Howard.

“There!” said Edith, “that is just what we told him, wasn’t it Bertha?”

A general laugh, at Arthur’s expense, followed this sally of Edith’s.

“I object,” said Mrs. Graham. “When I turned Arthur over to these two young ladies, I warned him that he must be quick witted; he was not vanquished then, and it is not fair to have all the recruits go to one side; so, Arthur, I will act as a rear guard to you.”

“In that case, I capitulate at once,” said Mr. Howard.

“I felt that my cause was just,” said Arthur; “but I hardly hoped for so fair a champion.”

“Your aptness for flattery is remarkable,” replied Mrs. Graham; “did you inherit it?”

“I gave you due notice that I had capitulated,” interposed Mr. Howard, “and the victor can well afford to be merciful.”

“But precipitous surrender leaves no renown,” persisted Mrs. Graham.

“I think, Mrs. Graham, you have reaped glory enough

for one day," said Mrs. Howard, quietly; "for in all the years that I have known my husband, I have never seen him so abjectly penitent as he is now."

"Come, Edith," said Mr. Graham, "all the others have laid down their arms; you and Bertha had better do the same, and let peace once more reign over our fair land."

"Edith and I still remain true," answered Bertha; "though beaten, we are not conquered!"

"I believe that a woman never surrenders except after a long siege," suggested Arthur.

The laughter that followed, completely routed the already disorganized forces of Edith and Bertha, and as they left the table, Mr. Graham turned to Mr. Howard and said: "I am afraid you do not favor a college education."

"I have more objection to the education of our boys in habits of idleness and vice that college associations give, than to the education they get, or fail to get, from books," replied Mr. Howard.

"I would most certainly send a son of mine to college," replied Mr. Graham. "The risk there would not be more than that which he would meet in commercial life—is that not so, Arthur?"

"I don't know that I am able to judge correctly," replied Arthur, doubtfully; "but I should say that the young men of both places are about the same. Some of the clerks in our store are men that I would not like as companions or trusted counselors; others I cannot but respect and would gladly follow. This is equally true of those I meet in and about college. But there is one thing that makes it easy for college boys to form bad habits, and that is, idle

time. Outside of this, I can see no difference in the temptations of college boys from those in other pursuits ; but even this difference is partly overcome by the idle hours between the close of business and late bedtime."

"Now, that is it exactly," continued Mr. Graham. "Arthur has given you a statement of what he knows by experience. The cause is the same in either case. If a young man has not the moral courage to avoid these vices, you may erect all the barriers around him that is possible, and yet it will do no more to make him able to resist the alluring influences of vice than keeping plants in a hot-house fits them to stand the biting frost. It is, after all, what is in the youth that determines what the man will be."

"But you will admit that it is unwise to place even the strongest plant in the greatest cold," persisted Mr. Howard.

"Not if the plant is toughened against its influence," replied Mr. Graham, quickly ; "for in the Arctic regions we find the lichens growing as thriftily as these plants that cause my wife so much care. No ! Give me a young man with deep-rooted, firmly fixed principles, who does right because it is right, and I will trust to his coming out all right in the end !"

"On that point I entirely agree with you," replied Mr. Howard. "But how best to accomplish that end is what I am desirous of finding out."

"That I am unable to tell you ; but I know of no better way than to develop a sturdy self-reliance in their own judgment of right and wrong, and then rely upon their moral integrity to fulfill the promptings of that judgment.



I hardly need add that the time for this development is from their earliest childhood until they leave home to go out into the world and battle against its temptations."

"But you will admit that there is a vast difference in boys," replied Mr. Howard, confidently; "and some naturally so bad that we despair of ever finding a trace of self-respect upon which to build this development of which you speak?"

"I am forced to admit that such is the case," replied Mr. Graham, sadly; "but what a wonderful difference it might have made with these same boys had their home surroundings been of the character I have briefly outlined. I would ask no better proof of the correctness of my views than to have you search the early history of just such boys and find what their home influence has been. Then turn to the more pleasing picture, and find what the home influence was in the childhood of some of our best men."

"But it is often quoted," replied Mr. Howard, "that the sons of ministers are sure to become worthless men — how do you account for this?"

"Granting that it is true," said Mr. Graham, "it only serves to prove the correctness of what I have just said. In the few cases where ministers' sons have disgraced their fathers' calling, you can trace the cause directly to the home influence."

"But certainly you do not claim that the home influence in a minister's household can be other than good?" replied Mr. Howard, with a questioning look.

"I am compelled to say just that," replied Mr. Graham, positively. "In many cases it is true that the surround-

ings of a minister's family are as bad for the healthy growth of its youth as is that of many a household where religion is never thought of. The children are ruled with a rod of iron; every childish act made to conform to the rigid rules of the father's own life; the whole atmosphere of the household is one of constant restraint, not only against evil, but, I fear, against nature itself. The result is, that when this unnatural restraint is thrown off, and the youth leaves his father's control, the evil influences that surround him have ten fold more attraction for him, and he has but little, if any, moral stamina with which to resist. No, Mr. Howard, we are both growing old, and should have only encouragement for those who must take our place. We know what the struggle is; they have it yet to learn. Why, then, should we not give them the benefit of our experience, and make their load that much lighter."

"I, too, have learned these trials by experience," replied Mr. Howard, musingly; "but what you have said has never occurred to me so forcibly before."

"Men wonder at the greatness of this city," continued Mr. Graham, "and yet, to a very large extent, it owes its greatness, its dash and untiring energy, to the fact that our young men are trusted and given a chance. No city in the world has so many young men at the head of large enterprises; no city has brighter, sharper, or more active men,—and all because they are given an opportunity to develop the material that is in them. The result of this is seen in the rapid strides this city has made. The world looked on and predicted the early collapse of its mushroom growth; but the never-tiring muscles and unbounded enthusiasm of

these young men carried it at a bound where the world now recognizes it to be firmly rooted. What the result of restraining our young men would have been, I must leave to your imagination ; but as for Arthur, I think you will be safe in leaving him to take his own course. He has the true metal in him, and you will see it developed in due time."

"I am pleased to hear you say so," replied Mr. Howard, "and I must thank you for this friendly advice, for I now feel more at rest concerning him than ever before."

"It's worth trying," replied Mr. Graham, laughing ; "it can do no harm in any event."

Arthur had meanwhile been holding an animated and pleasant conversation with Mrs. Graham, while his mother was being entertained by Edith and Bertha.

Mrs. Graham's courteous reception of Arthur, and her championing of his cause at the table, had completely won his good opinion of her as a lady and pleasant companion ; so when she again sought him, he eagerly accepted the opportunity of showing his appreciation of her kind attentions by entertaining her to the best of his ability, though, from the difference in their ages, he anticipated but little pleasure for himself. It was, therefore, with some embarrassment that he suddenly realized that he had been occupying considerable time in relating his personal experiences to Mrs. Graham, who was apparently a most interested listener. Realizing his breach of etiquette, he blushing hesitated for a moment, when Mrs. Graham, gathering up the broken thread of his conversation, deftly led him towards subjects of more general interest. Arthur readily

followed, and found the change from witness to listener much more to his liking. But Mrs. Graham's object had been accomplished : she had, without his appreciating the fact, purposely led him to speak of himself until she had obtained a thorough insight into his character and capabilities, and having accomplished her purpose, she brought about the lull in their conversation that brought so forcibly to his attention the fact that he had for some time been talking of himself.

"I must really beg your pardon for staying so long," said Arthur, looking at his watch ; "but I have so thoroughly enjoyed myself that I did not realize it was so late."

"You need not hurry, for I have likewise been well entertained," replied Mrs. Graham, kindly.

"You are very kind ; but if I do not spare you I must at least take pity on my father and mother, for, as you know, they are not accustomed to being up so late," replied Arthur, with a sly glance at his mother.

"In that case we cannot say nay ; but we shall see you again, shall we not?"

"I should be most happy to comply, Mrs. Graham," said Arthur, his whole impulsive nature filled with gratitude at the remembrance of her many kindnesses.

"Then let it be soon," replied Mrs. Graham, earnestly.

"And let me add my endorsement of that, too," added Mr. Graham, as he bid Arthur good-night.

"And we shall be ready to renew our combat," said Bertha, as she extended him her hand.

"And you?" said Arthur, turning to Edith, "will you fight, too?"

“At a moment’s notice,” replied Edith, laughing.

When Arthur was left alone with his father and mother, at the door, he said: “I have enjoyed this evening much more than I expected.”

“Yes,” laughingly replied his father, “I noticed that you and the young ladies seemed very much occupied.”

“Not in that way,” replied Arthur. “It was because I was hungry for something else than the bustle of business and business men. This great city throbs with commercial life; the great arteries of trade pulsate with never-tiring energy. The young men from all parts of our great country are drawn here to give their life’s work and energy,—to cast their lot within her borders with the hope of realizing their ambitions, only to stand in the chill night air without the walls of these palaces of luxury, listening to the strains of sweet music that carries their thoughts to loved and loving ones left at home,—to lose themselves in thoughts of happy boyhood days, while wondering if fickle fortune will ever favor them. To them the doors of these palaces are never opened, though the *blase* man and the *roue* may find ready access to their inner mysteries. It is this I meant when I said I enjoyed myself to-night. I could have been content to have sat in the shade of these walls without a word. The change was what was needed; and one family like Mr. Graham’s has the power for much good among us young men. The more’s the pity there are not more of them. It is the absence of home surroundings that drives so many of the college boys and, I dare say, the clerks, too, to seek recreation and enjoyment in the billiard halls and gaming hells. After these young men have

become habitual visitors at these places, society points the finger of scorn at them and says—"See the character of these men! is not that sufficient reason for our not recognizing them?" Our churches make no allowance for their temptations: their creed is of rigid iron to the young men without power or station, while to the men of wealth and power it is of most flexible steel. The ministers choose their words with greatest care, that they may not offend the wealthy men of their congregations. With them thus uncared for, what can you expect will be their lives as men! I tell you that society is on a wrong foundation. The man who steals many thousands from his employer is spoken of as in financial difficulty; but society does not close its doors upon him. The Jean Valjean who takes a loaf of bread from the baker's window to feed his starving children is a thief, and society brands him as such forevermore. The man and wife who find enjoyment in their little home are beneath society's notice; while the flashily dressed dolls of fashion, no matter how their position is obtained, are leaders, and all others but poor competitors in the unsatisfying race. Thank heaven! I have neither the means or time to follow after such pleasures, and by the time I have, I hope that I will have learned that they do not satisfy."

Arthur was rapidly approaching the condition of home-sickness so common to those of his age, and his mother's exclamation of "Poor boy!" did not tend to help matters; so, hastily bidding them good-bye, he rushed down the steps on his way home, where in the night's sleep that followed he lost his thoughts and awakened only to the memory of the pleasant experiences of the night before.

## CHAPTER IV.

### MRS. GRAHAM REVEALS HER PLANS.

The appearance of Arthur in the household of Mr. Graham had solved the most difficult part of the problem of Mrs. Graham in regard to Bertha, and calling her to a seat by her side, she said :

“ Now, Bertha, I am prepared to tell you more of my plans. It has puzzled me a great deal to find a reason for proposing your adoption to Mr. Graham. This I have now found, and my plan is to have Edith marry Arthur Howard.”

The face of Bertha grew deathly pale as she listened to Mrs. Graham, who had closely watched her while she was speaking and quickly noticed the change. In a moment the truth flashed across her mind, then, with a smile of unutterable scorn, she asked :

“ Can it be that you have been pierced so soon ? Well, more’s the chance for my plan succeeding with Edith ; and I can assure you, if I am any judge, that you have no cause for hope with Arthur. At present he has no thought of love for either you or Edith ; but he will follow fast enough when I lead him, and you must give up all these foolish notions and work to that end, for in this way alone



can we succeed. After they are married, the house will be quiet and her father lonesome ; then you must talk of leaving us, and I will propose to Mr. Graham that we adopt you as our daughter, to make company for us ; this done, and you will be entitled to one-third of his estate and Edith will get that much less ; this you will divide with me, and still have enough to make you independent for the rest of your life."

"This will take a long time," suggested Bertha, wearily.

"'Tis true," replied Mrs. Graham, "but why need we hurry ? Mr. Graham will live several years yet, and that will give us ample time, while in the meantime you will live here and enjoy the same benefits as if it was already accomplished. Do we understand each other, Bertha ?"

"I think we do," replied Bertha, who exhibited but little enthusiasm in the matter.

Whatever Bertha's feelings toward Arthur had been, they were now changed to deepest hatred. Mrs. Graham knew human nature only too well when she intimated to Bertha that Arthur spurned her, and her first impulse was to openly rebel ; but her sense of dependence upon Mrs. Graham quickly checked these feelings, while her bitter thoughts, as she chafed at the position in which she found herself, made her moody and silent for many days, during which her friendship for Edith was seriously strained, but she was not yet prepared to break with her ; and thus, in a turmoil of doubt between her fears and hatred, Bertha became a puzzle to Edith and Arthur, who, encouraged by the urgent invitations of Mr. Graham and his wife, soon found himself a regular visitor at their home, it being customary

with him to attend the Sunday evening service at the church in which Mrs. Graham was a leading spirit. As might naturally be expected, this church was in the most aristocratic portion of the city, the congregation made up of the most fashionable residents and supplemented with a choir of the most noted singers. Nothing less would have suited the refined taste of Mrs. Graham, who was at the head of all its entertainments and missionary work, while in all things pertaining to the church she was the all in all ; and it was through her influence that Mr. Graham became an officer in the church, her idea, as she expressed it to Bertha, being that no harm could come to her by reason of the powerful position thus held.

Fate could not have more auspiciously opened the way for the success of her plans concerning Arthur than did the natural course of events. To Arthur, her home and its surroundings was the Mecca toward which all his thoughts turned when, tired and overburdened with care, he sought this haven of rest and peace ; and like a weary traveler who lies prone upon the earth, and seeing only the wide expanse of blue untroubled heavens above him, feels a sense of peace and restfulness stealing over him, too indolently blissful to ask the wherefore or why, he felt himself at ease surrounded by friends willing and ever ready to welcome him and counsel and advise ; and though he often wondered at his good fortune, he felt content to know that it was, without inquiring why. Thus by degrees Mrs. Graham was binding him by cords of friendship and gratitude in a bond that appealed to his every sense of manhood and justice, and, as Mrs. Graham well

knew, with Arthur these could not be easily broken. As time passed she felt that she held him completely in her power, ever ready and willing to serve, while, without realizing it, he was being thrown more and more into Edith's society, where, blind and intoxicated with pleasure, he followed so readily that Mrs. Graham often wondered if she lead at all, until, conscious of her power, she sought an opportunity to speak with him, and ushering him into the parlor, said, with a knowing smile:

"Edith and Bertha have gone out for a short time, but sit down and I will entertain you as best I can until Edith returns."

Arthur quickly caught the meaning of her words, and a flash of worried pain shot across his brow as he thought—"Have I, then, shown Edith such noticeable attention as to cause remark?" He sat silent for a moment, and then, as if waking from a blissful dream, while a sense of his humiliation closed about him, he said:

"Mrs. Graham, I have always visited here with a full sense of the honor you do me by admitting me to your family circle—I may say, as one of it. I have been cheered and comforted to struggle on by the fresh courage I have here gained. I have spoken of my hopes and aspirations, my doubts and fears. This has been the home of my relaxation, and in its quiet and seclusion I have been frank and open. But during all these pleasant hours I have never forgotten the difference in our station. If, then, I have overstepped the bounds of propriety in my attentions to Edith, I can only say that no one regrets it more than I, and my apology must be that it was unintentional."

Mrs. Graham saw that her meaning had not been understood, and that Arthur would now be more cautious than ever, unless before she left him he thoroughly understood her desires ; so, with a light, easy laugh, she said :

“ Your fears, Arthur, are entirely unwarranted. I know full well that to the young the society of those near their own age is far more agreeable than that of those their seniors. Beside this, I have watched your actions while here, and I can truly say that they have been entirely satisfactory to both Mr. Graham and myself. We feel that you have a high sense of honor, and are entirely willing to leave to you the guidance of your course.”

“ If he does not understand my meaning now,” thought Mrs. Graham, “ it is clearly his own fault.”

The return of Edith and Bertha at this moment interrupted their conversation, and hastily rising, Mrs. Graham had only time to say: “ I may want to speak to you again on this subject.” Then entering the hall, she told Edith that Arthur was waiting for her in the parlor, and as Edith disappeared from sight she took Bertha’s arm and led her away in the opposite direction.

Arthur had been greatly annoyed by his conversation with Mrs. Graham, and Edith’s entrance was a welcome relief.

“ We were not certain that you would come,” began Edith, “ and so thought we would not wait on an uncertainty—or on you, either. But tell me how it happens that you have so greatly offended Bertha ? ”

“ I was not aware that I had done so,” replied Arthur, with no little astonishment.

“Well, something has occurred,” said Edith, positively, “for she feels very bitterly toward you.”

“How did you find that out,” inquired Arthur, earnestly; “what did she say?”

“O, nothing in particular,” replied Edith; “but I thought you knew the cause, and only asked in the hope that I might be able to set you right.”

“For that reason,” replied Arthur, earnestly, “I ask you to tell me what she said.”

“O, she said very little about the matter,” replied Edith, evasively, “but her manner indicated that she hated even the mentioning of your name; and in speaking of you she said you would never graduate; you thought you were awful smart, but you had not brains enough to pass even a creditable examination.”

“Well, if that was all,” replied Arthur, laughing, “I ought not to complain, for I half believe it myself. But it is not very consoling, for all that.”

“Well, I do not believe it, nor do you, either,” replied Edith, with some warmth; “you must and will graduate.”

“Well, a few more weeks will tell,” replied Arthur, doubtfully.

“Yes, a few more weeks and we shall know. And now I want to tell you of a surprise I have in store for you,” said Edith, exultingly. “I am expecting a cousin to visit me, and I have found out that she is also a cousin of yours.”

“Then you and I must be cousins,” replied Arthur, quickly, as he looked up at Edith, inquiringly.

“O, no; that does not follow at all. Your uncle,

Ralph Gerald, many years ago married my aunt Lucy, and now lives in a small village in the East. Their daughter Florence is my cousin, but you cannot claim me as your cousin on so slight a pretext as that," and Edith laughed heartily at his mystification.

"Well, then, I suppose we will have to call her the connecting link," said Arthur, demurely.

"O, I have no objection to that," archly replied Edith.

"Well, I can assure you that I shall await her coming with considerable interest," replied Arthur, laughing.

"And desert us entirely, I dare say," replied Edith, gayly. "But come, there is the tea bell, and we must go," and Edith, with the freedom and innocence of a sister, took his arm as he led her to the table.

As he entered the room with Edith, and his eyes met Mrs. Graham's, he recalled her conversation, and with ill-concealed confusion hastily seated Edith, determined to make amends by being more attentive to Bertha.

"So you and Edith have been out for a walk?" began Arthur, as he turned toward Bertha.

As if in doubt, Bertha looked first at Edith and then at Arthur, and curtly answered—"Yes, sir!" then turning to Mrs. Graham she resumed an apparently interrupted conversation.

Edith, all unconscious of these occurrences, maintained her usual flow of conversation, and Arthur was forced, even against his resolve, to continue to pay his addresses to her.

"I'm having some queer experiences," thought Arthur, "and what Edith said about Bertha seems to be true, but I know not why; and even Mrs. Graham seems unusually

attentive to Bertha's conversation. I wish Mr. Graham were here, for then I could at least divide my attentions to Edith." And so with his roving thoughts he made but half-hearted replies to Edith, while for the first time her companionship did not seem as agreeable as formerly ; and as they led the way on their return from the table, Arthur boldly entered the sitting-room, determined to bring about a more general conversation ; but to his surprise, Mrs. Graham and Bertha passed the open door and made their way to the parlor, where, seating themselves, they continued their conversation.

"Your mother and Bertha seem to be very much occupied this evening," said Arthur, inquiringly, turning toward Edith.

"O, I dare say Bertha has some interesting story she is telling," said Edith, carelessly.

"But Mrs. Graham seems to be doing most of the talking," said Arthur, pointedly.

"Well, then, I don't know what it is," replied Edith, noticing Arthur's abstracted manner, and to whom his visit seemed more constrained than ever before.

In doubt as to Mrs. Graham's feelings, and puzzled by the change that had taken place, Arthur decided to take his leave, and determine what his future course should be before he called again. As he arose to leave, Mrs. Graham's watchful eyes detected his intention, and she quickly stepped to his side, saying—

"You are not going, are you, Arthur?"

"Yes, I think I had better be going," replied Arthur, quietly.



This did not suit Mrs. Graham's plans, and she inquired, with some surprise: "What is the cause for your hurry, Arthur; have you not been pleasantly entertained?" and she shot an angry glance at Edith.

"O, yes," replied Arthur, with a reassuring smile, "I have been very pleasantly entertained, but I must leave you now," and stepping into the parlor where Bertha sat, with no apparent intention of noticing him, he said, as he extended his hand—"Well, Bertha, I shall have to bid you good-night."

"Good-night," replied Bertha, without lifting her eyes from the book in which she seemed to be most deeply interested.

Her manner vividly brought to Arthur's mind the words of Edith, and quickly determining to know its cause, he asked:

"What have I done to offend you, Bertha?"

"Nothing that I know of," replied Bertha, flushing slightly.

"But you are displeased at something," said Arthur, confidently; "will you not tell me what it is?"

"I cannot," said Bertha, desperately.

"We can at least part as friends," said Arthur, earnestly, as he again extended his hand.

Bertha silently took his hand, and Arthur could not but notice its trembling; but he little knew the tumult that was raging in Bertha's mind.

"It is strange," said Mrs. Graham, passionately, as Arthur left her alone with Edith, "that you cannot behave like a lady and make it pleasant for Arthur during the short time he visits here."

Edith had been greatly puzzled by Arthur's actions, and now Mrs. Graham's reproof confirmed her belief that in some manner she had unwittingly offended him, and, all unconscious of Mrs. Graham's object, she doubtfully inquired:

"But how have I offended him, Mrs. Graham?"

This was a puzzling question, but Arthur's entrance at this moment saved the necessity of a reply, and turning to him with a gracious smile, Mrs. Graham said:

"I trust, Arthur, that you will soon come again, and we will try and make it pleasant for you. Good-night!" and Mrs. Graham cordially extended her hand. Then, turning to Edith, she asked, with a half command—"Will you be kind enough to see Arthur to the door?"

When out of her hearing, Edith turned to Arthur and said, anxiously:

"Arthur, I am afraid I have not treated you as you deserve, but it was only carelessness and entirely unintentional; may I expect your forgiveness?"

"Forgiveness for what?" inquired Arthur in astonishment.

"Well—I hardly know," replied Edith, doubtfully, "unless it be for my manner."

"I wouldn't forgive you if you changed your manner," replied Arthur, impulsively; "it could not be for the better. And now I must bid you good bye for some time, as I shall not soon see you again; but when I do, I will have good news for you or I will have to confess that I have not 'brains enough to pass even a creditable examination.'"

"I have no fear of the result," replied Edith, confi-

dently ; “but promise me that you will come as soon as you can.”

“I will,” replied Arthur. “Good-night !”

“Ah, Bertha,” said Mrs. Graham, as with a satisfied smile she returned to the parlor, “if Edith will only give Arthur some little encouragement I feel sure that our plans will succeed. He is a splendid fellow,” continued Mrs. Graham, all unmindful of Bertha’s feelings, “and will make Edith a better husband than she deserves—though I was not thinking of that when I planned it,”—and Mrs. Graham laughed pleasantly at the thought of her success ; “and the best of it is, that I have no trouble with him, he does just what I want him to and in the most pleasing way, while he seems to know what I desire before I have time to tell him.”

“I believe you are half in love with him yourself,” said Bertha, with a mixture of sadness and hatred in her voice.

“No, Bertha,” replied Mrs. Graham, pensively, “I have no weakness for sickly sentiment like that. I was moulded too matter of fact for that ; but—Well, what do you want now ?” said Mrs. Graham, petulantly, as Edith appeared at the door.

“I came to ask you if you could tell me in what way I have offended Arthur ?” began Edith, hesitatingly.

“If you were not an idiot you could see for yourself,” said Mrs. Graham, angered at her boldness in asking the question.

“I asked in the hope that I might be able to avoid it in the future,” replied Edith, sadly. “I cannot willingly offend Arthur, and do not see how I have.”

“If you can make up your mind to appreciate Arthur and understand that he thinks more of you than he would of a sister, you would have no trouble,” replied Mrs. Graham, significantly, though somewhat mollified by the revelation Edith had unwittingly made.

“I will try,” replied Edith, half mournfully, as she silently left the room.

## CHAPTER V.

AYE, THAT'S THE KEY THAT UNLOCKS THE MYSTERY !

Time hung heavily on Edith's hands when Arthur's accustomed time for coming passed without his being present, and at these times she often found her thoughts turning toward him in her anxiety for his success ; and Mrs. Graham, feeling that it was to her advantage to encourage her in these thoughts, often turned the conversation in that direction.

“ It has been a long time since Arthur has been with us,” began Mrs. Graham one evening as they were all gathered in the library.

“ Yes,” replied Mr. Graham, “ he is no doubt busily engaged with his books about these times.”

“ It must be no easy matter for him to keep up in his studies while attending to his other duties,” continued Mrs. Graham.

“ It is a wonder that he can do so at all,” said Mr. Graham, earnestly.

“ He certainly exhibits some fine points of character,” suggested Mrs. Graham.

“ Yes,” replied Mr. Graham, “ but I fear he may break down under the load. I noticed the last time I saw him that he looked worried and very pale.”

"If he does succeed," interposed Edith, "it will be by his own exertions."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Graham, "Arthur is one of a thousand and deserves to be encouraged."

"That is true," replied Mr. Graham, thoughtfully; "and if under all these disadvantages Arthur Howard is successful, I will loan him the money to start in business for himself. With his pluck and energy and my years of experience I feel sure he could soon make a good showing."

Mrs. Graham looked at Bertha with a knowing smile, while Bertha, comprehending its full meaning, remained moody and silent.

"I will hold you to that promise," said Edith, "for I know he will succeed."

"All right, daughter," said Mr. Graham, pleasantly; "if he succeeds I will pay the forfeit."

It was but a few days after Mr. Graham's promise that Arthur entered the house, his face flushed with success, and rapidly recounted his experiences

"I have but a moment to stay," continued Arthur, ail out of breath, "but I wanted you all to know the good news: I have passed my examination successfully, and will graduate!"

"We are pleased to know that it is over and your work well done," said Mrs. Graham, kindly.

"You stood at the head of your class, I suppose?" said Bertha, sarcastically.

"No, I was below the average," replied Arthur, as he quickly recognized the hidden sting. "But I was well pleased to get through at all."

“O!” replied Bertha, significantly.

As he hastened away, Edith followed him to the door, and placing her hand upon his arm detained him long enough to say—“Father has promised to start you in business for yourself, and I will see that the promise is fulfilled. Good-bye !”

His college work finished, Arthur once more resumed his customary visits at Mr. Graham’s; and it was not long afterward that Mr. Graham offered him his aid in starting in business. This Arthur eagerly accepted, and in a short time had settled down to a business life that gave every promise of being satisfactory to both Mr. Graham and himself.

It would have been impossible for either Edith or Arthur to have named the time when they first became interested in each other. Arthur’s enthusiastic ways, coupled with his robust youth, had early interested her, while his trials had intensified her desire for his success. She had thus been drawn toward him by easy stages, the progress of which she did not realize. Arthur looked upon her as the daughter of his most valued friend, and enjoyed the time spent in her company, realizing in her his grandest thoughts of woman. Their two lives were thus unknowingly drifting down the torrent that knows no returning tide.

This had been noticed by Mrs. Graham, and at her first opportunity she called Arthur to her side, and, recalling her former conversation, said, with a knowing smile :

“Great changes have occurred since our last conversation on this subject—eh, Arthur ?”

“Yes, and I fully appreciate your aid towards their accomplishment,” replied Arthur, gratefully.



“I know you do,” replied Mrs. Graham, confidently, “and our closer relations gives me courage to speak of another subject that deeply interests us both. With my love for Edith, I cannot bear to see her affections becoming deeper and deeper entangled with each succeeding day without giving you warning of it. I fully recognize that this is a delicate matter, Arthur, but I trust that my great love for you both will be sufficient excuse for my speaking so plainly.”

Edith’s entrance at this moment relieved Arthur from the necessity of replying, but under the circumstances her presence was equally embarrassing; and when Mrs. Graham soon after left them alone, he found it no easy matter to entertain her. Mrs. Graham’s strange words had been so unexpected and startling in their revelations, that he could not overcome the feeling of depression that they had created. Edith quickly recognized his changed manner and moody silence, and laying her hand gently on his, she said :

“Arthur, something troubles you ; what is it ?”

“I cannot tell you, Edith ; I hardly know what it is myself.”

“Have I offended you in any way ?” inquired Edith, anxiously.

“No, it is myself that offends me : I am perplexed and at unrest with myself.” Then rising, he silently prepared to take his leave, while Edith followed him to the door, trusting that before he left he would give her some word of explanation ; but he only extended his hand, and said, half mournfully—“Well, Edith, good-bye !”

“Why, Arthur,” said Edith, with a low, startled cry, “you say good-bye as if forever !”

“And that is what I intend, Edith,” said Arthur, firmly. “I feel that I must do so, though much against my desires ; but it may set my mind at rest.”

Edith held his hand, and detaining him, said :

“Can you not tell me why you are at unrest ?”

Arthur hesitated a moment, and then, looking up at her, said :

“It is the difference in our station. I love you, Edith, firmly and truly ; but your position and mine are so widely apart that I despair of ever being more to you than a friend, and it will be better for us both if we do not meet again—at least, not soon.”

“And why ?” questioned Edith, with wonderful calmness.

“Why ?” repeated Arthur, in astonishment : “and do you ask why ? Do you think I can so far forget the obligations I am under to you and yours as to ask you to leave a home like this and cast your lot with me ? No, no ! it can not be !”

“A woman that would not, would hardly be worthy of the name of wife,” answered Edith, upon whom Arthur’s agitation had the effect of more clearly bringing out her more noble traits.

“And could you go with me to a home of toil and comparative poverty without regretting it ?” inquired Arthur, wonderingly.

“I could !” replied Edith, firmly. “My mother did it, and so could I.”

“Well, that much of our plan is accomplished!” began Mrs. Graham, exultingly, when next she saw Bertha after Edith’s announcement of her engagement to Arthur. “Now I will take the reins and have them married in short order.

“I think your last talk with Arthur must have made an impression,” said Bertha.

“Well, it was plain English, and I guess he finally understood it,” replied Mrs. Graham with evident satisfaction. But she never knew how near her plans came of failing.

“Hush! there comes Edith,” whispered Bertha.

“Well?” said Mrs. Graham, inquiringly, as Edith entered the room and thereby interrupted their conversation.

“I came to ask if you had finished reading this?” said Edith, laying her hand upon a book that was on the center table, close by Mrs. Graham’s arm.

“No, I have not,” curtly answered Mrs. Graham, “but of course I can wait.”

“I will not take it if you desire to read it,” replied Edith, quietly.

“I should think you could better employ your time than by moping over such books as that,” replied Mrs. Graham, tartly.

“I would willingly do so if I knew there was anything to do,” said Edith, quietly.

“If you kept your eyes open you could find plenty to do,” replied Mrs. Graham, contemptuously. “But it takes more time to find you and get you started than to do it myself.”

“Then give me some regular work and I will see that it is done every day,” said Edith, determined, if possible, to please her.

“O, no,” replied Mrs. Graham, languidly, “I will continue to do it myself and save you the exertion.”

“But,” persisted Edith, “it would be a pleasure to me.”

“No !” said Mrs. Graham, angrily. “I have always been forced to do the drudgery while you played lady. You know nothing, and can do nothing. I am tired of seeing you around, and will be only too well pleased when you are married and away.”

In her rage Mrs. Graham’s voice had gotten into its highest key, her passions plainly showed themselves upon her face, when, looking up, she saw Mr. Graham standing transfixed in the doorway. Mr. Graham loved peace above all things, and was willing to make almost any sacrifice to obtain it ; but he could not fail to fully comprehend the scene presented to his sight as he entered the door ; and when Mrs. Graham had finished, he said, quietly, but with a gentle firmness that could not be misunderstood :

“We shall have Edith with us but a few days at most, and I desire that those days be made as pleasant for her as possible.”

In his presence, Mrs. Graham was more careful of her actions toward Edith after Mr. Graham’s suggestion to her, and Edith fully appreciated it ; but she was only too well pleased when the time arrived for her to leave her old home and go with Arthur.

Mrs. Graham made elaborate preparations for the wedding, but it was noticeable that the guests represented but

a small proportion of Edith's companions or of the friends of her mother; the new faces were of Mrs. Graham's choosing, and Edith had but little to say in regard to the preparations. At last the appointed hour arrived for "Mrs. Graham's reception," as Edith in after years was wont to call it, and Arthur and Edith were married and away. They had already decided upon a house that just suited them; and soon after their marriage settled down to the comforts of home life, Edith busying herself with her household cares during the day, and when Arthur returned in the evening they found great pleasure in recalling the times gone by, never to return again.

On one of these occasions Arthur turned to Edith and laughingly said :

"You don't seem greatly downcast, Edith, because of leaving home and coming to this hovel."

"Hovel ! Why, Arthur !" said Edith in surprise. "It is a palace compared to my former home. It gives peace and happiness, and that is more than I have ever enjoyed since the coming of father's second wife. The old saying, 'A mother's a mother all the days of her life, and a father's a father till he get's a new wife,' proved true in this case, and Mrs. Graham's sarcasm and venom often made my life a burden."

"There ! there ! Edith, you ought not to feel that way toward Mrs. Graham," replied Arthur, hastily. "Let bygones be bygones. For my part, I never saw anything in Mrs. Graham that was not of the most ladylike character, and I am sure she is much easier to get along with than Bertha. A more puzzling case than she I never found. Why she

should have acted so strange I cannot understand. Then, too, one minute she is as pleasant as a summer's day ; the next, a biting frost. I can only account for our misunderstanding on the ground of incompatibility."

"That was an awful big word, Arthur ; did you learn that at college ?" said Edith, laughing.

"Well, big or little, Edith, I have made up my mind that if she persists in sitting in the room when we are there I shall quickly take my leave, for I cannot stand her exasperating ways," replied Arthur, determinedly.

"I know one thing, Arthur, and that is that father does not like her actions toward you," replied Edith, consolingly.

Arthur had from the first the utmost confidence in Mrs. Graham's sincerity. 'Tis true her talks to him and scheming in regard to Edith had somewhat broken his confidence in her, but so plausible were her reasons for all she did that he spurned the thought of ever questioning her motives ; and so, when Edith told him of her experience, he attributed it to a misunderstanding on the part of both, and decided to do all he could to discourage Edith in her dislike toward his tried and true friend. It was with this object in view that he often persuaded Edith, though much against her desires, to visit her old home with him ; but Bertha's actions had grown to be so marked that even he sometimes faltered in his resolve. It was on one of these occasions that Arthur found her so exasperating that he hastily withdrew, his cause for so doing being readily understood by Mr. Graham, who, as he returned to the room after bidding Arthur and Edith good-night, said:

"I am afraid, Bertha, that your remarks hurt Arthur's feelings."

“O, pshaw!” laughingly replied Mrs. Graham. “Bertha only spoke in general terms and meant nothing by what she said.”

But when Bertha went to her room, Mrs. Graham followed her, and closing the door, stood fixedly looking at her until Bertha cowered under her gaze. Then her rage burst its bounds.

“Are you a fool?” demanded Mrs. Graham, passionately. “Have you not the discretion of a servant girl? Your conduct is simply unbearable! I had intended to speak to Mr. Graham to-night of our plans; now, because of your folly, it will have to be delayed for weeks, and I may be unsuccessful then. In the meantime, who knows what may happen! Mr. Graham seldom reproves; but depend upon it, when he does his words do not express the half he feels.”

Bertha’s long experience with Mrs. Graham had taught her that she was in no mood to receive her replies, and she wisely held her peace. And she judged aright; for after her first outburst Mrs. Graham modulated her voice, and with an entreating look at Bertha, said:

“Why will you not help me?—or, if you will not help, can you not at least keep your hands off and let me manage this matter? If you cannot be kind to Arthur, you can at least treat him decently until our aim has been accomplished.”

“You taught me to hate him,” replied Bertha, bitterly, “and now censure me because that hatred has grown.”

“Aye, you are an apt scholar in that line!” sneeringly replied Mrs. Graham. “Be as apt in learning discretion



and all may yet be well. If you do not, you leave this house a beggar !”

Bertha's eyes involuntarily followed her as she silently left the room, and not until the door was closed between them did she attempt to move. Then, sinking into a chair, she sobbed—“Would that I had known the price ere I consented. The only one I ever cared for is now as far removed as earth from heaven. Was it for this that I gave up all, only to find myself bound in an intrigue that leaves me no escape !”

Mrs. Graham saw that all her plans were liable to fail if this warfare continued, and feeling certain of her hold on Bertha, she determined to write to Arthur and place the matter in such a light that all would once more be pleasant. So the next morning, when Arthur opened his mail, he found her letter, and with some curiosity opened it. His astonishment may well be imagined as he read :

“MY DEAR ARTHUR :

“I have noticed with much uneasiness the growing dislike you have for Bertha. I have talked with Mr. Graham about this matter several times, and last evening, when you left in such haste, he spoke to me about it, and begged me to hush it up as best I could, for he is so ashamed when these scenes occur that I find it troubles him for days afterward. He also says that he never saw a person in all his life so far as Bertha is from assuming rights that do not belong to her. We would be dreadfully ashamed to have it known that this feeling existed.

“As to her making herself at home here, she was invited to come, and on the express condition that she must make herself at home and not expect to be treated as company, or even waited upon as such ; and it was on this under-

standing that she came as and to be one of the family. Notwithstanding this, when I saw the way Mr. Graham felt I begged of him to turn her away or let me do so, and try to have an end of the matter. But he says he will not, without some better cause ; that if it was not this it would be something else, for we know the jealousy and prejudice on Edith's part that causes all this trouble. So I am in a strait between two. I want to please you, but cannot bear to do anything so contrary to Mr. Graham's feelings. I can bear anything myself, but for his sake I do wish that things might be pleasant. I write this that you may know how matters stand.

"I want to have another opportunity of talking with you as soon as possible. Meantime I am yours, with many regrets for anything unpleasant, but with much love, always,

SARAH J. GRAHAM.

"P. S. Please burn this as soon as read. S. J. G."

"It has then come to this !" muttered Arthur, as he finished reading the letter. "Had it been told me, I would not have believed it. Am not I the one that has been wronged ? If Mr. Graham can show me where I have wronged Bertha I will willingly apologize, but I know he cannot. Well, I'll hand him this letter and demand his reasons for saying what he has ; that will put him to the test."

When Mr. Graham entered Arthur's office his cheery good morning did not sound as welcome as usual to Arthur, who, in reply, handed him the letter, asking him to read it.

Arthur took a position where he could watch the expression of his face, and saw the unconcern with which he opened the letter,—the look of curiosity as he read the first lines, then the deathlike paleness that came over him as he finished reading it.

As Arthur watched these changes, all his heat and passion deserted him, while in their place came only pity for his old and well-trying friend, yet he knew not the cause.

Mr. Graham's hands trembled as he replaced the letter, and handing it to Arthur, with quivering lips, said :

“Arthur, destroy it, and don't tell any one of it, not even Edith.”

“Is it true?” demanded Arthur, hoarsely.

“No!” faintly answered Mr. Graham, with a groan—“it is not!”

Can it be, thought Arthur, that this woman would deliberately do an act like this, knowing that what she wrote was false! I cannot understand why she should resort to such desperate measures! She must have known that I could easily hand it to Mr. Graham. But—aye! that's the key that unlocks the mystery! She felt that she was safe from that, and had I not asked Mr. Graham for his side of the story she would have been safe. Ah, shrewd, designing woman that she is! She well knew that this is not often done. I'll now make it my duty to study her until I know her thoroughly.

This subject was never afterward referred to by them, yet Mr. Graham seemed now more readily to consent that the visiting between them should be mostly on his part; and as Mrs. Graham never failed to attend the weekly meetings of her sewing society, he took this opportunity to visit his children, as he was pleased to call Edith and Arthur. At these times his thoughts and conversation were often of the days when he and Edith's mother were starting in life under similar circumstances, and, as Edith

often remarked to Arthur, he seemed to live over again the happy days of his early married life. These visits had continued for sometime, when one day Mrs. Graham was compelled to return home, owing to a slight indisposition, and coming into the house at the usual dinner hour was greatly surprised to find that no preparations had been made for the noonday meal. On finding the cause, and that this had been Mr. Graham's custom for some little time, her rage was unbounded ; and, like a caged tigress, she paced the floor during the hours of her waiting for his return.

All unconscious of what was in store for him, Mr. Graham entered the room, where he was met by his now infuriated wife.

"So you have been down to Ediths, have you ?" began Mrs. Graham, with flashing eyes. "It seems that every time I step out of the house you must run down there, as if it were the only place you cared to stay, and your home and wife were disagreeable to you."

"I thought you were going to stay at the sewing society, as usual," replied Mr. Graham, soothingly, "and as it is more pleasant to have company than to eat alone, I thought I would visit the children."

"O, you did !" said Mrs. Graham, with a sneer, "and I am to take this as notice to me to give up the sewing society and stay at home to be company for you ? Well, I knew when I married you that I should have to be your slave, but I hardly thought it would come to this !" And she swept past him out of the room.

Mr. Graham's heart often yearned for another visit to Edith's, but this was his last ; and as he was deprived of

her society more and more, he grew to miss her presence in her old home and be very lonesome because of her absence.

More than a year had passed since Edith's marriage, and yet Mrs. Graham had found no favorable opportunity to ask Mr. Graham to adopt Bertha ; and as one time seemed to be no more favorable than another, she had at last grown so desperate as to determine that she would wait no longer. So one evening, after she had made her conversation a little more pleasing than usual, she said to Mr. Graham :

“Do you know that Bertha intends leaving us soon ?”

“I had not heard of it,” replied Mr. Graham, in surprise. “I thought she was a permanent member of our household.”

“I sincerely wish she were, Stewart, for I am heart-sick at the thought of her leaving. The house will be very lonesome without her.”

“If it gives you pleasure, she is welcome to remain in our house as long as she desires,” replied Mr. Graham, earnestly. “Can you not prevail upon her to remain ?”

“Stewart,” said Mrs. Graham, impressively, “if we were to adopt her as our child we could keep her and have a daughter to comfort us in our old age.”

Mr. Graham for a moment looked his wife full in the face, as if he doubted that he heard correctly, and then said, slowly :

“While I am not sure that I want her to stay, I am sure she can never be a daughter of mine. I have but one daughter, and as for Bertha's taking her place, it is impossible.”

He rarely spoke so positively to her, and Mrs. Graham

fully realized that her plans had failed ; but her nerve and self-reliance did not desert her, as, in a voice that showed no signs of her defeat, she replied :

“ I have no feeling in the matter ; I simply made the suggestion for you to accept or reject, as you saw fit.”

“ I trust the subject will not be referred to again,—to me it is not a pleasant one,” replied Mr. Graham, as he arose and left the room.

Mrs. Graham sat absorbed with her thoughts. She was inclined to take her defeat philosophically, but found it hard to submit after her long and persistent efforts. As she sat thus meditating, the door opened and Bertha entered the room. Looking up, Mrs. Graham said :

“ Well, Bertha, I have spoken to Mr. Graham and he has rejected the proposal so positively as to leave no doubt of his meaning. I am sorry, but you have yourself to thank that it is so. Your actions toward Arthur were alone sufficient to make Mr. Graham dislike you, and I have some fear that he knows of that letter I wrote to Arthur.”

“ Now that it is settled,” replied Bertha, “ I feel a sense of relief more than disappointment. The position it placed me in was all but pleasant, and many times I have bitterly repented that I ever consented. Mrs. Graham, it was a scheme that no honorable woman ought to propose or entertain. Thank God ! I have not so strong a love of money as to make me willingly sell my soul to obtain it. After I consented, I saw no way by which I could retract ; but now I am pleased to know that I am free.”

“ You are a fool !” said Mrs. Graham, in disgust. “ You

talk more like a babbling babe than the woman I supposed you were."

"Don't let us quarrel over this matter, Mrs. Graham," said Bertha, appealingly. "We have been friends too long for that; and while you had hope, I stood by you to the end."

"Yes, so you did, Bertha," said Mrs. Graham, half remorsefully, "and I give you credit for your help. But your will power all flies to the wind in our defeat. I have no use for that kind of material—'tis only fit for show, to be admired by the idle throng; but show your courage and I will again be your friend."



## CHAPTER VI.

### YOU HAVE POISONED HIM !

“Arthur, have you noticed that father has not been here for several days ?” said Edith one evening, as he entered the house.

“I do, Edith, now that you speak of it ; but what makes you ask ?”

“I am afraid he is sick, Arthur, or he would have been here before this.”

“O, no ; it is more probable that he has been engaged in other ways and has not had the time to visit us,” replied Arthur, reassuringly.

“But, Arthur, I have had a feeling of great uneasiness all day.”

“A slight attack of the blues, that’s all,” interrupted Arthur, laughing. “Why, if he were sick we would hear of it at once. What more natural than that they should inform us if such were the case.”

“It would seem so, Arthur ; but I would feel more at ease if we were to call and find out for ourselves.”

“Well, we can do that,” replied Arthur, who saw that the impression had taken deep hold upon Edith.

Bertha received them as they entered, and to Edith’s

questioning, said : "Your father has not been well for several days, but he is resting easier now, and we trust he will be up in a short time."

"But why have I not been informed of this?" demanded Edith.

"I cannot say," replied Bertha. "Mrs. Graham is with him now and could answer you better than I. But, Edith, I think you need not be alarmed, for his physician says all he needs is rest and quiet and he will soon recover."

"Then I had better not disturb him to-night," said Edith, inquiringly.

"I might ask Mrs. Graham and see what she thinks," suggested Bertha.

"Do, please."

And as Bertha disappeared, Edith turned to Arthur, saying :

"I do not understand why we were not notified."

"It does seem strange, Edith; but then I suppose they were all busy and had other matters to think of."

"This does not look like it," said Edith, holding up a piece of hand-painting that was lying on the table.

"But that may be Bertha's work."

"No, Arthur, it is Mrs. Graham's and has but recently been laid aside; there is Bertha's embroidery over there."

"But, Edith, how do you know this was so recently laid aside?"

"Can't you see that the paint has not had time to dry? Bertha is evidently teaching her to paint this fancy work while she works at her embroidery."

"Mrs. Graham says it would be as well not to disturb your father now," said Bertha as she entered.

“Then I will come in the morning,” said Edith, “and shall expect to see him then.” And as they left the house she said : “I feel as if I was a stranger in that house now. I could not help but notice that there was a barrier through which I could not pass. Bertha seems to be free to enter where I cannot.”

“I must confess it had that appearance,” said Arthur, forced to admit its truth. “But you can go in the morning and see him then.”

Mr. Graham, after struggling for some days against his sickness, found himself at last unable to leave his bed. To a man of his age this was a serious matter, and feeling that it was best to guard against even possibilities, he said to his wife :

“I wish you would ask my lawyer, Mr. Blood, to come and see me ; I wish to make some changes in my will.”

“O, you must not worry with that now,” replied Mrs. Graham. “You will be well again in a few days and can attend to it then.”

“I hope I shall, but I fear not,” replied Mr. Graham, despondingly.

“The best way to regain your health is to leave off worrying about such matters as these and think of more cheerful subjects,” said Mrs. Graham, tartly.

“If Mr. Graham gives you any message to take to his lawyer,” began Mrs. Graham, entering the room where Bertha sat, “before going consult me. He has a foolish notion that he must change some of the provisions of his will. Now, that will was drawn when he was in health, and I am fully satisfied with it. I saw it drawn, and it

leaves me one-third of his estate, and absolute dictator of the amount Edith can have each year, and gives me full control of his entire estate, to sell or lease as much as in my judgment may seem proper. If now he should make changes, I know not what their effect might be, and I must be careful to prevent his undoing that which he really desires to accomplish; so you do as I request, Bertha, for his sake and mine."

"I have no desire to do otherwise," replied Bertha.

"I have been thinking over the matter," began Mr. Graham, as his wife again entered the room, "and I think you had better ask Mr. Blood to come."

"I thought you had given up this matter until you once more regained your health," replied Mrs. Graham, with much apparent solicitude.

"I feel that my end is approaching, and that I shall never again be well," replied Mr. Graham, looking appealingly at his wife, with the hope that she might accede to his request.

"You must be more courageous," said Mrs. Graham, bursting into tears; "determine that you will live and half the battle is won. This done, and you will the more quickly recover."

"Well, I will wait until the doctor comes, and if he says there is hope I will try to believe him for your sake," said Mr. Graham wearily.

When good-natured Dr. Hammond entered the house he was quickly met by Mrs. Graham, who, ushering him into the parlor, said :

"I wish to see you before you go to Mr. Graham."

"Your husband is not worse, is he?" hastily inquired the old doctor.

"No, I think not," replied Mrs. Graham, thoughtfully; but he has given up all hope of recovery, and I think that alone would be sufficient to make the result doubtful. I have talked to him of it, and he has finally consented that if you will assure him that he can recover he will try and believe it. Now, why can you not do so, and thereby give him more strength than all your medicines can?"

"Well, Mrs. Graham, I certainly can do that, for you know that while there is life there is hope,—sometimes very little, 'tis true, and this is one of those cases."

"Do you then think there is but little hope of his recovery?" inquired Mrs. Graham, the ready tears springing to her eyes.

"It can do no harm to tell you the truth, Mrs. Graham, especially as you have the rare good judgment to exhibit no alarm in his presence. I regard this case as almost hopeless; his age is against him, and beside this, the disease is almost always fatal."

"How long do you think he can live?" inquired Mrs. Graham, eagerly.

"O, he may live a week, but more probably only three or four days."

Mrs. Graham's tears prevented her making any reply, and Dr. Hammond quietly stepped to the bedside of his patient.

"Is it you, Doctor?" said Mr. Graham, opening his eyes.

"Yes," replied the doctor, with a friendly smile, "and

well pleased to see you looking so much better. Your color is more natural, and your pulse beats stronger and more full than when I left you yesterday."

"Do you, then, think that I will get well?" And Mr. Graham's eyes showed the anxiety with which he awaited the reply.

"Why, my dear sir," said Dr. Hammond, with a good-natured smile, "you must have no other thought than that. 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' you know, and you must determine that you will; that is the best medicine I can prescribe for you."

"I hope it will be so," replied Mr. Graham, doubtfully; "but something tells me it cannot be. But, Doctor, promise me that you will give me warning while my mind is clear; I must change my will before I die."

The old doctor stood irresolute a moment, and then said, quietly: "Preparations of that kind can be made at one time as well as another, by the sick or by those in full health, and I would recommend you to attend to it soon, so that it will be off your mind."

As he passed out, he stopped by the chair where Mrs. Graham sat with covered eyes, and said:

"I have recommended Mr. Graham to make the desired changes in his will."

Like a flash, she stood erect before him. "And who gave you the authority to do that?" demanded Mrs. Graham. Then, instantly realizing her mistake, she added:

"Do you not know that it will kill him?"

"As his medical adviser I take the responsibility," replied Dr. Hammond, curtly.

"And to your superior judgment, I submit," said Mrs. Graham, as with cold dignity she bowed her acquiescence.

"I must see Mr. Blood at once," said Mr. Graham, wearily, as his wife again entered the room. "The doctor says it will be best to do so and have it off my mind."

"What important business have you with Mr. Blood that makes you risk your life to see him?" inquired Mrs. Graham, provoked at his persistence.

"I must make some changes in my will," replied Mr. Graham, almost inaudibly.

"I thought you had a will already," persisted Mrs. Graham.

"So I have," replied Mr. Graham, with an evident effort; "but I must make some changes. You know Edith was not of age and was unmarried when that was drawn."

"I think it is so foolish for you to worry and fret over such matters," replied Mrs. Graham, reproachfully, "when you can just as well leave them until you are stronger."

"By sending for Mr. Blood at once you will save me much unnecessary worry—will you do it?" said Mr. Graham, desperately.

"Why certainly, if you desire it," replied Mrs. Graham, placidly.

Mrs. Graham sat in her parlor for some time, trying to clearly see her way. At last she arose and entered the sick man's room.

"Have you sent for Mr. Blood?" anxiously inquired Mr. Graham.

"Certainly, and he will no doubt be here before evening," replied Mrs. Graham, quietly.



But the hours dragged slowly on, and evening came and went, and yet Mr. Blood did not appear.

The next morning Mr. Graham was perceptibly worse, and calling Mrs. Graham to him, said :

“ Please send another message to Mr. Blood and tell him that I must see him at once.”

Mrs. Graham seemingly complied, and a short time afterward returned with the reply that Mr. Blood was out of the city, and would not return for several days.

Mr. Graham closed his eyes with a groan.

“ Would it not be better to give up this notion, my dear ?” said Mrs. Graham, persuasively. “ It is certainly making you worse. Will you not do it for my sake ?”

“ I cannot ; I must attend to it, even though it kills me,” and Mr. Graham turned his face to the wall, filled with anxiety and doubt.

True to her promise, Edith called and asked for admission to her father’s room.

“ He is too sick to be seen by any one,” was Mrs. Graham’s decisive answer ; “ and you have stayed away as if you had no regard for him.”

“ I did not know that he was sick,” said Edith, piteously. “ If you had sent me word I would have come at once.”

“ O, certainly, lay all the blame for your misdeeds on me,” replied Mrs. Graham, with a sneer.

“ But can I not see him,” said Edith, imploringly, “ if for no more than a moment ?”

“ Most assuredly not,” replied Mrs. Graham, determinedly. “ Dr. Hammond has left strict orders that no one must visit him.”

Edith felt sick at heart, and with it all, her conscience troubled her that she had delayed so long.

Mrs. Graham was flitting in and out of the sick room, now to call a servant, then again to obtain some necessary article, each time carefully closing the door behind her, and with it Edith's hopes.

Edith waited patiently as the time passed heavily by, hoping that some fortunate circumstance might give her an excuse for entering her father's room ; but no opportunity was given her. It could not hurt him for me to see him a minute, she thought, and had summoned all her courage to again make her request, when, with more excitement than was usual with her, Mrs. Graham suddenly opened the door, and, quickly passing through the room, disappeared. In her haste she left the door slightly ajar.

This was Edith's opportunity, and lightly stepping to the door she saw her father was awake, but O, so pale ! The sight nerved her to the act, and opening the door she entered ; and as her father recognized her, his countenance lit up with a faint smile of pleasure, as he said :

“ Is that you, Edith ? ”

“ Yes, father.”

“ Tell my lawyer, Mr. Blood, or his clerk, to come at once ; I must see him. Don't forget.”

Edith knew that Mrs. Graham stood in the doorway. Though she had not seen her, she felt her presence, and was violently trembling.

As she stood there, Mrs. Graham seemed a perfected picture of baffled cunning and intense surprise ; and as Edith attempted to leave the room, she slowly made way

for her, her eyes meanwhile searching her through and through.

"O, don't look at me that way!" cried Edith, now thoroughly terrified. "Why don't you speak."

"Words cannot express my feelings—go!" and with flashing eyes and a wave of her hand Mrs. Graham turned and entered her husband's room, leaving Edith nearly breathless with affright.

Weak and trembling, Edith hastily left the house and made her way to the office of Mr. Blood, where, sinking into a proffered seat, she asked :

"Is Mr. Blood in?"

"He is."

"Please tell him that Stewart Graham's daughter must see him at once."

In answer to the summons, Mr. Blood quickly made his appearance.

"You are Mr. Graham's lawyer, are you not?" began Edith, not entirely recovered from the effects of her affright.

"I am," replied Mr. Blood, pleasantly.

"He is very sick and must see you at once," said Edith, in one breath. "When can you go?"

"In that case I shall go now," replied Mr. Blood, earnestly. "Your father and I have known each other too long for me to hesitate when he calls."

Edith had returned home but a few moments when, to her surprise, Mr. Blood knocked for admittance.

"Mrs. Howard," he began, "are you sure you understood your father's wishes?"

"I am certain the message I gave you was the same he gave me. What makes you doubt it?" inquired Edith in surprise.

"I hardly know," replied Mr. Blood, with a puzzled look; "but when I told Mrs. Graham that I had been sent for she seemed greatly astonished, and was very positive that I was not needed. I insisted that Mr. Graham had sent for me, and she as positively assured me that if such were the case she would have known of it. I could arrive at no other conclusion than that you were mistaken, so I thought best to see you."

"Mr. Blood, my father wants you!" said Edith, positively. "I am as sure of that as I am that I am here. His words were: 'Tell my lawyer, Mr. Blood, or his clerk, to come at once. Don't forget!'"

"Then I shall go back and see him," said Mr. Blood, resolutely.

"Bertha, did you go for Mr. Blood, after all I said?" inquired Mrs. Graham after she had closed the door upon the attorney.

"No, most assuredly not," replied Bertha, in some surprise.

"Then it was Edith," said Mrs. Graham, indignantly.

"Very likely," replied Bertha; "for she is the only one who knew that he was wanted."

As Mr. Blood again entered the house he had so recently left, he said.

"Mrs. Graham, I am forced to believe that your husband desires to see me; will you do me the favor to ask him?"

"He is sleeping now," replied Mrs. Graham, pleasantly, "and I do not like to disturb him."

“Very well ; please notify me when he wakens ; I will sit here until I can see him.” And Mr. Blood leaned back in a comfortable chair, prepared for a siege.

His assurance had taken from Mrs. Graham her most trusty weapon — her coolness ; she was now nervous and excited, and at a loss for an answer, she retired from the room.

One long hour Mr. Blood sat in his chair, his thoughts occupied with his afternoon’s queer experiences. At the end of that time he believed he understood the case ; so when Mrs. Graham entered and announced that her husband was awake and would see him, he silently bowed his acknowledgement and followed her to Mr. Graham’s bedside, where Mr. Graham’s smile of recognition quickly assured him that he was no unlooked for intruder ; so without wasting words he turned to the business in hand with a—

“ Well, Mr. Graham, what can I do for you ? ”

“ My dear,” said Mr. Graham, turning to his wife, “ will you leave me with Mr. Blood for a short time ? ”

“ Certainly,” replied Mrs. Graham, retiring, but leaving the door slightly ajar.

“ Now, Mr. Blood, please close the door and then we will talk,” began Mr. Graham.

Mr. Blood stepped to the door and carefully closed it.

“ I have intended for some time to make some changes in—please close that door, Mr. Blood.”

Mr. Blood placed his shoulder against the door until he heard the catch snap as it found its place, and with a satisfied air returned to his seat.

"I have intended—Mr. Blood, you may close that door and lock it," said Mr. Graham, firmly.

Mr. Blood, with grim satisfaction, turned the key and thereby secured the unruly door.

"These changes," continued Mr. Graham, "I will briefly outline to you, and you can put them in proper shape and I will sign them."

Mr. Blood rapidly wrote out the required changes, and with Dr. Hammond as witness, concluded his business and departed.

"I have left Mr. Graham a powerful opiate," said Dr. Hammond, as he left the bedside and advanced toward Mrs. Graham. "I find I can be of no benefit to him now, except to make his last hours easier. Be careful to give only the ten drops each time, and I will call again in the early morning. By the way, Mrs. Graham, I must ask you to take more rest. You must let some one else watch with Mr. Graham while you seek needed quiet and repose."

"I do not dare to run the risk," replied Mrs. Graham, earnestly.

"Some one must take your place," said Dr. Hammond, firmly. "Who will it be?"

"Arthur would, if notified," replied Mrs. Graham, submissively.

"I will see him, Mrs. Graham, and have him come to-night,"

So Arthur, after receiving full directions and many warnings in regard to the dose of the powerful opiate, was stationed as the midnight watcher. He had never before had so painful a task assigned him as this of watching the agony

of his beloved friend while he stood by without the power to aid ; and it was with a sense of relief that he saw Mrs. Graham enter in the early morning, and after holding a whispered conversation with her relating to the events that had occurred during the hours he had watched with Mr. Graham, he stepped to the door, when he was startled by a smothered cry of alarm, and quickly turning, saw Mrs. Graham, apparently greatly agitated, holding a small vial between the light and her eyes.

“What is the matter ?” questioned Arthur, in alarm.

“Have you given Mr. Graham all of this ?” said Mrs. Graham, indicating the empty portion of the vial.

“Yes—no—let me see !” Then taking the vial, Arthur said, with much astonishment, “No, I have not—Mrs. Graham, this bottle had more in it than this when last I had it.”

“What would the world say, Arthur, were they to know of this—this—carelessness, to say the least,” inquired Mrs. Graham, looking fixedly at him.

“I care not what they would say,” replied Arthur, indignantly. “I gave the medicine exactly as it was ordered.”

“To say the least, it places you in a very disagreeable position. Persons would naturally think you an interested person, if they should hear that you had given Mr. Graham a fatal dose,” and Mrs. Graham moved toward her sleeping husband, and leaned over him, the more forcibly to impress Arthur with her words. As she did so, Arthur’s quick eyes detected a glistening something on the carpet where she had stood. Stooping down, he placed his hand



upon it, and finding it was moist he quickly detected that it was a part of the contents of the vial.

“There is where a part of it has gone, Mrs. Graham, and by your carelessness or intent,—I cannot now determine which,” said Arthur, indignantly.

The look of baffled rage which Mrs. Graham turned upon him was to Arthur unexplainable, but he little knew the many hours during which she had sought an opportunity to gain a hold upon him; and now, when he was left to administer this powerful medicine to Mr. Graham, she felt that the time had arrived when she could place him in her power, and through his fear of exposure, control him in case he desired to deviate from her commands.

Carefully she had calculated upon the results of Mr. Graham’s death, and but one thing alone remained in doubt, this was the question of Arthur’s course, but with this hold upon him she felt that she would be secure. Fully determined upon her course she entered the room, and as Arthur turned to leave, she hastily emptied a portion of the medicine upon the carpet, and then stepping upon it, arrested his attention by her low cry of alarm. But Arthur’s quick conception of her designs, and the firmness with which he met her charges and indignantly repelled them, made her falter in her purpose, and quickly stepping to his side, she said:

“Let me have the vial, Arthur.”

“No,” replied Arthur, firmly, “I will keep possession of it until Dr. Hammond comes.”

“O, pshaw !” said Mrs. Graham, with a careless laugh, “you need not take it so much to heart as that, Arthur. I

may have been careless, and probably was; and when I noticed how much was gone I was naturally much surprised."

"It's too serious a matter to me to be so lightly disposed of," replied Arthur, indignantly. "I must settle the question so positively that you will never dare to mention it again, then you may have the vial."

"Now, Arthur, please don't be foolish," said Mrs. Graham, appealingly. "Remember that these things are often productive of much scandal, and we cannot afford that."

"Why did you not think of that before you accused me of poisoning Mr. Graham?" demanded Arthur.

"Arthur, I never made such a charge! I had no thought of it!" replied Mrs. Graham, indignantly.

"Well, I will keep the vial," and true to his word, Arthur kept close watch upon it until Dr. Hammond came.

"Doctor," said Arthur, when at last he made his appearance, "Mrs. Graham fears her husband has received a fatal dose of this medicine—can you relieve her mind?"

"How many doses have been given from this vial, Mrs. Graham?"

"I do not know," replied Mrs. Graham, hastily; "I have given only three."

"And I gave three," said Arthur.

"That would make pretty large doses," replied the doctor, after a moment's thought, "but not necessarily fatal."

Arthur began to feel easier.

"But if all but one were as you directed, and the rest given in one dose—how then?" questioned Mrs. Graham.

“In that case I should not like to be responsible for the consequences,” said Dr. Hammond, anxiously.

“But is not this the same?” asked Arthur, stooping down and running his hand over the carpet.

“I think that is where it has gone, Mrs. Graham; but here is a better assurance than all these,” said the doctor, gently grasping Mr. Graham’s wrist, while Arthur waited anxiously for his reply.

“His pulse indicates that he has received no more than I wished him to,” said Dr. Hammond, as he gently released his hold upon Mr. Graham’s arm. “’Tis true, his breathing is heavy and labored, but not more so than I would expect from the dose I ordered.”

Tears sprang to Arthur’s eyes as Dr. Hammond turned to him and said :

“You did your duty fully and need have no fears.”

“O, he did splendidly !” quickly interposed Mrs. Graham. “I was only afraid that he might have made a mistake while half asleep.”

“It was a serious charge, Mrs. Graham, to make against any one, particularly one who stands in the relation to you that Arthur does,” said Dr. Hammond, reproachfully.

Arthur’s presence gave Edith courage to again make an attempt to see her father, so entering her old home, she asked :

“Can I not be of some help to you ?”

“If you came to work, you can,” savagely replied Mrs. Graham ; “but we have no desire for visitors.”

Edith bit her lips to keep back the tears, and after a moment’s hesitation, said :

“I can at least sit by his side and watch while he sleeps—may I do that?”

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Graham, scornfully. “We are all worn out, and as that is about all you seem fit for, you might as well do that as to sit idly by.”

Edith lightly stepped into the room, and drawing Arthur to one side, said :

“Don’t go while I am here.”

“All right,” replied Arthur, as he placed a chair for her, taking which she felt a sense of security and quiet happiness in the thought that she could once more be near him she loved.

The irresistible onward march of death was fast closing about Mr. Graham, who was now unconscious and nearing his end.

“I think you had better call in the friends, Arthur,” said Dr. Hammond, solemnly.

Arthur quickly followed his suggestion, and in a moment returned, closely followed by Mrs. Graham, leaning on the arm of Webster Graham, her husband’s only brother, and closely following them, Edith’s Aunt Harriet, the only sister of Edith’s mother. A mournful circle they presented as they stood, silently, watching the doctor, who at last said, resignedly :

“It is over !”

A long, piercing wail startled the assembled friends, as Mrs. Graham sank into a vacant chair and broke into violent hysterical sobs. Aunt Hattie and Uncle Webster quickly came to her relief, and as they supported her into the other room, Arthur caught the look of disgust with which Dr. Hammond’s eyes followed her.

"It was overdone," thought Arthur; "her wailings were too loud and strong." Then turning to Edith, he became alarmed at her appearance: sitting bolt upright, her face deathly pale, she was staring fixedly at the dead; her eyes showed no signs of weeping.

"Edith! Edith!" said Arthur, shaking her violently—"you must come away."

"Yes," replied Edith, vacantly, as she mechanically took his proffered arm.

By the time they reached the sitting-room, whither the others had preceded them, they found Mrs. Graham once more composed, and calmly talking over the arrangements for the funeral.

"Some of the neighbors have called to see you, Mrs. Graham," said the servant, entering at this moment.

Mrs. Graham at once resumed her lamentations, and her cries were loud and long.

"Show them in," said Aunt Hattie, kindly.

"Edith, let us be going," whispered Arthur, upon whom Mrs. Graham's actions reacted violently.

"In a moment," replied Edith, who, after quietly pressing the hands of her old friends, withdrew with Arthur.

"I can never bear these howling death-bed scenes," began Arthur, as they left the house. "It always looks like effect more than sorrow."

"We should not judge too harshly," replied Edith, reprovingly.

"Well, I could but contrast her wailings with her acts during his life," said Arthur, bitterly.

"Yes, but let us change the subject, Arthur; it is not a pleasant one."

Mrs. Graham readily assumed the direction of all the preparations for the funeral, assigning Edith and Arthur to the same carriage with herself and Bertha.

Edith's stoical composure had been a constant check upon Mrs. Graham's demonstrative exhibitions of grief, and she felt a bitter resentment toward her because of it ; and as they were returning home, and Bertha's conversation turned upon the grief of many of the friends present, Mrs. Graham said, while looking fixedly at Edith :

“ Yes, even strangers have hearts, and show their sorrow, while others can lose even their best friends and care nothing. I cannot understand such dispositions ; they must be completely given over to selfishness.”

Arthur's blood fairly boiled as he recognized the venom of her words, and would have replied, had not the place and circumstances forbid. He had now seen Mrs. Graham long enough, and studied her character so thoroughly as to fully realize that she was a woman of exceeding strength and resources, and that it was no easy matter for the casual observer to resist her plausibility or comprehend her true character. It was well for both Edith and himself that he had these opportunities, and had improved them until he understood her every plan and move. The education thus attained was soon to be most severely tested.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A VILLAIN FOR A LAWYER AND A WILLING CLIENT.

Early the next morning Mrs. Graham entered the office of Mr. Blood, saying :

“ Tell Mr. Blood that Stewart Graham’s widow desires to see him.”

Mr. Blood had formed a great dislike for Mrs. Graham, and her presence was distasteful to him ; yet the vision of large fees for settling her estate quickly arose before him and decided his course, and offering her a seat, he said :

“ Did you desire to see me on business ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Mrs. Graham, the tears springing to her eyes, “ on sad business. You are the custodian of Mr. Graham’s will, and must realize the disagreeable position I am placed in when I tell you that I do not know its contents, and can neither pay my servants or buy the necessities of life without the feeling that I may make myself liable to the law.”

“ O, there is no danger of that, Mrs. Graham ; you can go on just as usual and the law will not hurt you in the least.”

“ But I would feel easier,” persisted Mrs. Graham, if I



knew what the changes were that you so recently made. Can you not let me see the will?"

"O, no; that would not do at all!" said Mr. Blood, quietly. "I must deliver it to the court and to no one else."

"Well, you can at least tell me how I stand," said Mrs. Graham, desperately.

"I can, in a general way," replied Mr. Blood, hesitatingly.

"Well, in a general way."

"Mr. Graham gives you a third of his estate, to be yours forever, and to descend to your heirs at your death," began Mr. Blood.

"The law would give me that much," said Mrs. Graham, scornfully; "but what becomes of the other two-thirds—to whom does it go?"

"His daughter Edith receives one-third, like yourself; no more, no less."

"And the remaining portion—what becomes of that?" inquired Mrs. Graham anxiously.

"The remaining portion is divided between his brother Webster, his sister, Lucy Gerald, and her children, in proportion as set forth in his will."

"And who has charge of the estate?" persisted Mrs. Graham.

"You are executrix, and Webster Graham is associated with you to guard the interests of the daughter. You two have sole charge of the estate, and with the advice of myself will find it an easy matter to settle it in a manner entirely satisfactory to all. I will start the proceedings in a few

days, and then letters of administration will be issued to you and Mr. Graham, and after that I will counsel with you as to your future course."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Graham, haughtily; "I shall need your services no farther than to have you enter the will for probate. I feel perfectly able to take charge of the matter, and will do so."

Mr. Blood for a moment was dumfounded to think that he had been so easily deluded by this cunning woman, who, when she had obtained the coveted information, spurned his aid and crushed his hopes.

"As you see fit, madam," replied Mr. Blood, indignantly; "but as Stewart Graham's trusted friend and adviser, I warn you that the danger is great if you pursue this course."

"I will take the responsibility of that and relieve you from all anxiety on that account," replied Mrs. Graham, haughtily as she retired.

Mr. Blood's earnest words had somewhat unsettled her purpose, and though her iron will brooked no opposition, she had the rare good judgment to first be sure of her position and then stand by it to the bitter end; so she determined to counsel with some of her friends, and as they all advised against her purpose of settling the estate unaided, she consented to act upon the suggestion of Mr. Fletcher and employ an attorney whom he recommended.

Mr. Skinner, as he sat in his office, gave every indication of needing just such clients as Mrs. Graham. Small of stature and spare in build, with low, receding forehead and small black eyes, he fully met the description given of

him by his fellow lawyers, as a man of no marked ability, but whose low cunning might well be feared. With unkempt hair, and clothes that plainly showed the constant wear of many months, he presented the appearance of a shabby-genteel man who might have seen better days.

"Are you Mr. Skinner?" asked Mrs. Graham, as she stood irresolutely in the doorway, her eyes meanwhile surveying his surroundings.

"Yes, madam," answered Mr. Skinner, hastily rising and proffering her a chair; "I am at your service."

"You were recommended to me by Mr. Fletcher as a lawyer who fully understood probate business, and whose charges were very moderate," said Mrs. Graham, as with an effort she concealed her disgust.

"O, yes," replied Mr. Skinner, quickly; "I know Mr. Fletcher—he is my landlord."

"Humph!" thought Mrs. Graham; "it's likely he was recommended to me in order to help him pay his rent; but he may be just the man I want for all that. I'll see."

"As to probate business," continued Mr. Skinner, "I have made a specialty of that for some years."

"I have in charge the estate of Stewart Graham—"

"That is a big estate; lots of money there, I am told," interrupted Mr. Skinner.

Mrs. Graham ignored the low-bred interruption, and continued: "While I have no authority to retain a lawyer, as yet, still I thought best to see you and obtain your terms and then decide."

"It would be impossible to set a price on such a case," replied Mr. Skinner, hastily, "but I can assure you that my fee would not be large."

“But that is indefinite, and I must know the exact amount; otherwise, I will go elsewhere,” said Mrs. Graham, determinedly.

“Ah!” thought Mr. Skinner, this woman is a sharp one; “I must make a low price and get the business, and then make the pickings fill the balance.”

“For the regular probate work I will charge you forty dollars,” replied Mr. Skinner, after momentarily considering the matter; “but any work outside of that I will have to charge extra for.”

“These extra charges must not exceed this proportion,” said Mrs. Graham, firmly.

“O, certainly not!” replied Mr. Skinner, reassuringly.

“Well, I think the price will be acceptable; but I cannot decide until I see my brother-in-law and talk with him. But I think you can consider it just the same as settled,” said Mrs. Graham, evidently well pleased with her bargain.

“Where is the will?” inquired Mr. Skinner.

“It is in Mr. Blood’s possession,—at least I suppose it is,” said Mrs. Graham, doubtfully.

“Very likely,” replied Mr. Skinner. “And shall I send him word to file it in court so that we can proceed?—of course on the supposition that I am retained; if I am not, there will be no charge.” Better get started, and then I am sure of being employed, thought Mr. Skinner.

Mrs. Graham stood irresolute.

“You have read the will, I suppose?” queried Mr. Skinner.

“What makes you ask?” hastily replied Mrs. Graham.

“O, it is unimportant,” quickly answered Mr. Skinner.

"It was your privilege if you chose to do so. You said, I believe, that this brother-in-law lived in another State."

"Yes."

"It would be an easy matter to have him declared ineligible," suggested Mr. Skinner, watching the effect upon his client, who made no reply. "It would only be necessary to bring it to the attention of the court and he would be compelled to reject him, as he would be beyond his jurisdiction."

The tempter was at work, and Mrs. Graham sat absorbed with her thoughts. It was with her only a question of policy.

This is a peculiar woman, thought Mr. Skinner, as he sat watching her while waiting for her reply. She is not of the common herd. A conscientiously honest woman would reject it with scorn; a foolishly dishonest one would eagerly accept the proposition. She is a puzzle to me now, but I shall soon learn her ways.

"You will readily recognize that this matter can be more expeditiously handled where there are but few to consult," continued Mr. Skinner, "and, necessarily, at less expense."

"I think I had better look over the matter before I decide," said Mrs. Graham, thoughtfully.

"It will do no harm to give it your attention," replied Mr. Skinner, with a meaning look, as he opened the door; then, closing it after her, he said, half audibly: "Well, I did not miss my mark when I made that shot."

On her way home, Mrs. Graham stopped at Arthur's store, and finding him in, said:

“ You may continue to attend to Mr. Graham’s business as you have done during his sickness, but I shall expect you to make an accounting to me each week until I receive my letters of administration, after which time I will attend to all these matters myself. I have to depend upon you now ; but after that time I will take full charge, and be accountable to my God and the judge and to no other living man,” and Mrs. Graham straightened herself, haughtily, as she thought of the power she would then possess.

“ Do you mean that Edith shall be kept in ignorance of what is being done ?” said Arthur, more astonished by her manner than her words.

“ The collection of the accounts and rents is a small matter, and I feel perfectly able to attend to all such little matters as these,” replied Mrs. Graham, looking fixedly at her questioner ; “ and it will not be necessary for Edith to interfere, and it would be useless if she did.”

“ But she is entitled to a portion of her father’s property, is she not ?” persisted Arthur.

“ I suppose she is,” replied Mrs. Graham, with a sneer, “ but that makes no difference, for I will attend to that ; and if she expects to get anything from this estate, take warning in time and don’t interfere.”

“ Very well,” replied Arthur, apparently resigned to his fate. “ When you are ready, tell me so, and I will make a final accounting and close the matter as far as I am concerned.”

“ Edith,” began Arthur, when he returned home after his interview with Mrs. Graham, “ I am convinced by my experience with Mrs. Graham to-day that we will have no

easy road to travel in our dealings with her. The change that has taken place in her is startling. She is bold and defiant, and has given me due warning that we must not interfere and that she will make no accounting ; and had she spoken the words, she could not have more clearly impressed me with the feeling that she now realizes the time has come for which she has waited these many years ; and, occupied as I am with my business cares, I have no time to watch what she is doing, and would feel that we were completely in her power were it not that we can employ a lawyer to watch her proceedings in court and have him report to us."

"And is she the executrix of my father's will ?" inquired Edith.

"It would seem so, from what she says."

"Then we can expect no mercy from her. You must see Mr. Blood at once, Arthur, and ask him what we can do."

"But, Edith, employing lawyers is an expensive luxury," said Arthur uneasily.

"I feel that I would rather waste money in defense, Arthur, than be robbed of it without resistance ; and would it not be the wisest course to find out what we can do, even if we cannot afford to force it to be done."

"I am agreed," replied Arthur. "I will see Mr. Blood at once."

"O, how my thoughts have wronged you, Arthur," said Edith, smiling through her tears. "I have often trembled when I looked forward to this time, and now your constancy stands out clear and distinct against the dark background of my distrust."



"What do you mean, Edith?" interposed Arthur, in surprise.

"I mean that I have noticed with alarm the influence that Mrs. Graham has seemed to have upon you, and have trembled for its result in case father should die. O, Arthur! I have been tormented by this woman as no one can understand unless they were to pass through the same experience; and when I saw her efforts to chain you as her slave crowned, as I thought, with success, my heart failed me; and when you have defended her actions and censured mine, I have often prayed for death. I hoped when I was married that I would be free; but her baneful influence seemed to follow even here, and not until now have I felt its curse removed."

"I have done wrong!" said Arthur, hoarsely.

"No, not you; it is I!" replied Edith, quickly. "I have cruelly misjudged you."

"But not without reason, Edith," quickly replied Arthur, "and I must now tell you a story that I hoped never to reveal. I was deceived by Mrs. Graham for many months, during which time I would have struck down any man who would say what I now tell you. During this time, and while I was completely under her influence, I would not have believed my own mother had she questioned Mrs. Graham's sincerity. The disagreements between you and Mrs. Graham I blamed you both for, but I desired that father Graham's life should be as pleasant as possible; and as I felt that I could not control her, my only hope was to check this feeling in you, and thereby disarm her. This I often did, though many times I felt its injustice to you.

During all this time I was Mrs. Graham's firm friend. But when the quarrel between Bertha and I resulted in my leaving the house so hastily, Mrs. Graham sent me a letter, the statements in which roused my indignation to such a pitch that I was ready to quarrel with your father ; and when next he entered my store I handed him her letter, intending to demand of him a retraction or his proofs. Before he finished reading, I saw that I had made a grave mistake. After reading it, he returned the letter to me, with a death-like pallor on his face, and, in a voice hardly audible, asked me to burn it. I demanded if its contents were true, and, with a groan that I remember to this day, he admitted that they were not. Edith, I did not burn that letter, and for his sake I have never spoken of it to you. But if it can repair the injury I have done, you are welcome to it. The rest is soon told. I saw that instead of the person I believed her to be, she was only a designing and unscrupulous woman, and from that time until now I have made it my duty to know her thoroughly. That duty has been fulfilled. After my confidence in her was once broken, her flattery and intrigues fell harmless at my feet. Since then I have quietly defeated several of her plans, and this, too, without her knowing that it was intentional. Now every day sees us drifting farther and farther apart, and I feel that I can never again think of her as a friend. O, but I must have been blind indeed ! But, Edith, I did not know the pain I was causing you."

"I don't feel it now, Arthur."

"No," said Arthur, choking with emotion, "and never shall again !"

Arthur then hastened to Mr. Blood's office, and after briefly stating Mrs. Graham's conversation, and that she had informed him that she was to be the executrix of her husband's will, said:

"My wife was Mr. Graham's only child. She would have been content to let the law take its course, not knowing or even thinking that it would not protect her, had it not been that Mrs. Graham took such great pains to impress upon my mind that when she had her letters of administration she would allow no interference from outside, and, as she expressed it, 'be accountable only to her God and the judge, and to no other living man.'"

Mr. Blood leaned back in his chair and laughed loud and long. "But did she really say that, Arthur? It sounds so tragic, you know; more stagey than real."

"That is exactly what she said, Mr. Blood; and what puzzles me is, how she knows so positively that she will be the executrix, when the will has not yet been opened."

"O, I can easily explain that, Arthur, for Mr. Graham was hardly in his grave before she was down here making inquiries as to how well she was provided for in the will; and not satisfied with having her curiosity appeased in that direction, she questioned me until she found out all the will contained."

"Has she reason, then, for saying that she will not be accountable for her acts?" inquired Arthur, anxiously.

"Not that I know of, Arthur; not from anything that is in the will."

"But how is it, Mr. Blood, that she is so well informed in regard to probate law? I find that she is perfectly con-

fident of her position being correct, and that she knows every step to take ; and she talks so easily of this or that channel being the safest course, while I must admit that I know nothing about such matters. This is something uncommon among women, is it not ?”

“It certainly is,” said Mr. Blood, with a conscious smile.

“Where does she get her education in this matter ?” inquired Arthur, in perplexity.

“I should say it has been her life’s study,” began Mr. Blood, again becoming serious. “I am an old man, and yet in all my life I have never known a woman with the peculiar talents that Mrs. Graham possesses ; and from what I know of her, I should say that without a doubt she married Edith’s father for his money, has planned to possess it, and will hesitate at nothing until she succeeds. I have seen more of her character than I care to tell you. She is a woman of iron will, plausible in speech, quick to see an advantage, and unscrupulous in using it. At bay, a wild cat, that claws at your vitals and dies with only one hope—that of vengeance. And it will be no easy matter to obtain justice from her. You can only do so by taking advantage of her weakest point, which, if I am not mistaken, will show itself by her grasping more than she can retain.—her will power being so great as to override her otherwise excellent judgment.”

“But will not the law and the judge make her comply with the exact word and spirit of the will ?” inquired Arthur.

“I am forced to admit that we have not arrived so near

the millenium as that ; and when we do, like Othello, ‘ my occupation will be gone.’ No, Arthur, the law only protects those who protect themselves ; or, in the words of Sydney, ‘ God helps those who help themselves. ’”

“ Well,” said Arthur, dejectedly, “ I shall talk with Edith and decide what we will do.”

“ Wait one moment, Arthur ; I cannot let you go without some consolation. Mrs. Graham is not the sole dictator. Mr. Graham’s brother Webster is an executor and equal in power with Mrs. Graham. It was for the purpose of protecting Edith that her father placed him there, and if you are smart you will take time by the forelock and make him understand this. If you wait too long, you lose even this advantage. Remember that !”

“ Well, we are in for it,” said Arthur, upon his return.

“ What did he say ?” eagerly inquired Edith.

“ He said the law helped those who helped themselves ; that we would not get justice at Mrs. Graham’s hands, if he judged her character correctly.”

“ Well, I know her well enough to say that he has,” said Edith, positively.

“ I am afraid he has, Edith. But uncle Webster is executor with her and has equal power, so Mr. Blood says, and advises us to see him as soon as possible and find out if he will protect your interest.”

“ I am afraid it is too late now, Arthur, for it is probable that by this time Mrs. Graham has him completely in her power. He is an older man than father was, and a woman with her powers of persuasion can easily influence him ; but it can do no harm to see him.”

"Has it occurred to you how difficult it will be for us to see him alone?" inquired Arthur.

"No, not until now," replied Edith; "but I can arrange that. I will send him a note and ask him to visit us; then, when he is here, we can soon see how he feels."

"I doubt if Mrs. Graham allows him to come; or, if she does, she will accompany him," said Arthur, confident of his knowledge of her intentions.

"She may not, Arthur, but I will write the note and then we can see."

After leaving Arthur's store Mrs. Graham returned home, and as she entered the room where Webster Graham sat reading, said:

"I believe we have found just the man we want to direct us in the probate business. Mr. Fletcher recommended him, and while out I thought I would call and ask his price."

"And how much was it?" asked Webster, quickly, to whom this was a matter of the first importance.

"Only forty dollars," replied Mrs. Graham, complacently.

"What! forty dollars for all the work?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Graham, "and I drove a pretty close bargain, did I not?"

"I am pretty clever at that business myself," replied Webster, confidently, "but you have done better than I could," and he chuckled to himself, while Mrs. Graham rose several degrees in his estimation.

"I feel the need of saving all the expense that is possible, and would liked to have engaged him, but I thought

best to first ask your advice," said Mrs. Graham, as if she felt her dependence upon him.

"And you say he is a good lawyer?" inquired Webster.

"One of the best in the city; and, withal, he is honest."

"You had better employ him," said Webster, as if he felt the matter rested entirely upon his decision. "I am entirely satisfied with your judgment in matters of this kind, and will only ask that you will give me as little work as possible; for I have my cares at home, and you know that I am not as young as I used to be."

To the plodding farmer, accustomed to the honest country folk, this woman seemed a wonderful being, possessed of remarkable aptness for business; and when she told him of her success with Mr. Skinner, he was, as he expressed himself, only too well pleased to be relieved of the cares and place them in other hands.

"There is another thing I desire to speak of," continued Mrs. Graham, "and that is, the importance of unity of action. You can readily see that the business can be more rapidly transacted when we are of one mind than when we take opposite views; and in case of any opposition from Edith, or any of the others, if we stand firmly together to protect the interests of all, it will be so much easier for us both."

"Yes, of course; I can see the truth of that, and I agree with you entirely," replied Webster, quickly. "You will be near the lawyer and can get his advice, then write me what you have decided upon as being best under all the circumstances, and I will agree to it."

"Well, I am pleased to find you a man of such excellent



judgment, and, withal, so easy to get along with," said Mrs. Graham, with secret exultation. "Under the trying circumstances of losing my dear husband,"—and tears filled her eyes and choking sobs for a moment stopped her utterance—"I—I should have found it hard indeed if I could not have found one to assist me."

"How is Edith?" inquired Webster, abruptly, his utterance a little thick from sympathy.

"O, she seems to be enjoying herself as usual. Her chief desire seems to be to get hold of her poor father's money; and at the funeral her eyes were not even wet. She acted more as though she enjoyed the excitement than otherwise."

"O, you should not say that!" replied Webster, deprecatingly. "Edith may be a little queer, but I think she loved her father."

"O, I think so, too! But she has changed greatly since her marriage. Her love for money has grown very strong, and, as I said, she seems very anxious to get hold of the money for which her father worked so hard that he is now in his grave and I am left without a protector!" And Mrs. Graham again gave way to her emotions.

"I think I had better go and see Edith; I will be back soon," said Webster, whose emotions at the sight of Mrs. Graham's grief were hard to control.

"O, don't go!" quickly answered Mrs. Graham. "Tea is just ready and I want your company."

"Well, I can go some other time," replied Webster, resignedly, as he again seated himself.

When Webster Graham retired in the early evening, as was his custom, Mrs. Graham said:

“Now, Bertha, I want your advice. You know that in the will Mr. Graham has been made an executor with me. Now, I want you to tell me if you think the relatives would have as much confidence in the estate being well managed without him as an executor as with him?—in other words, could I alone do as much without raising suspicions on their part as could be done by us jointly?”

“I should think not,” thoughtfully replied Bertha. “They have great confidence in Uncle Webster, as they call him, and his acts would almost certainly be acceptable to them.”

“But suppose I were to write to them frequently, Bertha, and keep them well informed—would not that do equally well?”

“It would help very materially, Mrs. Graham, but I doubt if it would give them the same confidence that they would have if they knew he was working with you; and as he is a childish old man, I should say you ought to find but little difficulty in moulding his opinions to suit you.”

“That is my plan in case I give up the other,” said Mrs. Graham, confidently; “but I must see Mr. Skinner before I decide positively.”

The next morning found the members of Mrs. Graham’s household assembled at the breakfast table.

“I shall be going down town this morning,” began Mrs. Graham, “would you like to accompany me, Webster?”

“Just going shopping?” queried Webster.

“Yes; there are a few errands that I must attend to,” replied Mrs. Graham, indifferently.

“No, I guess I had better stay at home and read the

paper, and this afternoon we can go and see Edith," was the reply.

This just suited Mrs. Graham, and feeling perfectly secure, she started on her way to lawyer Skinner's.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### YOUR DAUGHTER'S ATTORNEY, I BELIEVE.

"Aha ! I knew she would come," said Mr. Skinner, as he saw the widow alight from her carriage at his door. "I have seen too much of the world to believe that my words would not bear fruit. I knew her anxiety would increase until she knew more."

"Good morning, Mrs. Graham."

"I came to ask your advice," began Mrs. Graham, unceremoniously, as she took the proffered seat. My brother-in-law, who is made executor by the will, would undoubtedly give confidence to the relatives who are legatees, and any action by the executors while he acted as one would undoubtedly go unquestioned by them. Is not this a sufficient reason for allowing him to remain ?"

"It is an excellent reason, Mrs. Graham, and would be sufficient to decide the matter were it not that he might seriously interfere with your desires if he so chose ; while with him out of the way you are absolutely free to do as you choose, always, of course, keeping within the limits of the law, which you will find easy enough by following my advice. The courts in matters of this kind allow great latitude to the executors, as so many things are constantly

arising that no iron-bound rules can be made to apply to."

"I would feel more easy about it if he could not know that we were the ones that raised the objection to his acting," said Mrs. Graham, nearly won over.

"O, that is easily arranged," said Mr. Skinner, confidently. "I have only to call Judge Winter's attention to the fact that he is not a resident of this State and he will do the rest; this I can do in private and no one be the wiser."

"I think that will be the better plan," said Mrs. Graham, quietly.

"Decidedly!" replied Mr. Skinner. "And have you determined that I shall act as your attorney?"

"Yes, as the attorney for the estate," replied Mrs. Graham, cautiously.

"O, yes; the estate pays for it, of course. And when would you like to have me begin?" inquired Mr. Skinner; "would day after to-morrow suit you?"

"That will do."

"In that case we had better proceed at once to get the will into court and have the letters of administration issued to you, appraisers appointed to fix upon the value of the personal property, and set off the widow's award. You understand what the widow's award is, do you not?" and Mr. Skinner looked searchingly at his client to see the effect of his words.

"I am not certain that I do," replied Mrs. Graham, doubtfully.

"Well, it is an amount that is given to the widow for her support.

“Not all that she gets, is it?”

“O, no ; it is in addition to what the will gives you.”

“Then, in case the will gives me an equal third, would I get more than either of the other thirds ?” inquired Mrs. Graham, expectantly.

“Yes, to the extent of your widow’s award.”

“Is that the law ?”

“That is the law, and it is very strong on that point,” replied Mr. Skinner, confidently.

“How much is the widow’s award ?” inquired Mrs. Graham, thoughtfully.

“That is decided by the appraisers.”

“And can they make it as large as they desire ?”

“I can fix it so that you will be satisfied,” replied Mr. Skinner, confidently. “You had better name two of your friends that you can depend upon to do as you desire, and I will put in my clerk as the other one, and he will fix the amount so high as to satisfy you ; the judge will accept them and you will get your award.”

Mrs. Graham began to feel easy once more. The world was moving in the right direction, and as she started for home she felt that a good day’s work had been accomplished.

“Here is a letter for you, Mr. Graham,” said the servant, entering the room where he sat reading.

Mr. Graham opened the letter, and reading Edith’s urgent invitation, resolved that he would go at once and make her the visit he had long intended to make but never accomplished. So, telling Bertha where he was going, he started for Edith’s, where he sat for some time before Edith had the courage to ask him the questions she desired.

"Uncle," began Edith at last, "father has made you the executor of his will, has he not?"

"I believe he has, Edith."

"Well—well—I have an important question to ask you," said Edith, at a loss to know just what the question was.

Aha! thought Webster, so what Mrs. Graham said was true. Edith has sent for me in order that she may know how soon she can get her father's money. I must correct this spirit in her—it is not right.

"If you are executor of father's will," began Edith again, "you will protect my interests against Mrs. Graham if she attempts to obtain what belongs to me, will you not?"

"Edith, it pains me to see you make such an exhibition of greed," began uncle Webster, yielding to his sense of duty. "Mrs. Graham and I will protect your interests, and I trust you will be saving of your father's money when it comes."

"I shall have to be if I must rely upon what I get from her," said Edith, pointedly.

"Edith! Edith! I do not like to hear you speak so of Mrs. Graham!" said Webster, reprovingly. "A better woman could not have been placed in her position. She is careful, saving and shrewd in her management of the affairs of your father's estate."

"She usurps the place of a woman as far her superior as the angels are to mortals," said Edith, bitterly; "and you do my mother no credit when you say a better woman could not be in her position. A better woman has been there,



and had she lived I would not now be vainly supplicating you for protection."

"I respect the memory of your mother, Edith, but that should be no cause for your slanders upon Mrs. Graham," replied uncle Webster, sadly.

"I do not slander her; I am telling you only the truth. But here comes Arthur; he can explain what we desire better than I," and Edith ushered Arthur into the room, while uncle Webster's face showed his determination to resist them both.

"I was just telling uncle what we desired, Arthur," said Edith as he entered, "and we seem to have misunderstood each other. Can you not explain it so that he can more perfectly understand it?"

"It is a very simple matter," replied Arthur; "all we want is that you should know that you were made an executor for the purpose of protecting Edith's interest in her father's estate, and if you will do so."

"Edith needs no protection," replied uncle Webster, "and if she did the law would be sufficient. Both Mrs. Graham and myself desire nothing more than that she shall get all that her father leaves her, and use it well when she gets it."

"The law is a poor protector, uncle Webster; and excuse me if I again ask you if you will protect Edith's interests against Mrs. Graham?"

"It is an insult to Mrs. Graham to ask such a question," replied Webster, angrily, "and I shall leave it unanswered. I am very sorry that your minds are so occupied with the thought of getting this money. It does not look well to be so grasping."

“When you know Mrs. Graham as thoroughly as I do,” replied Arthur, earnestly, “you will more fully realize that our course has been dictated by ordinary prudence, rather than by greed. You must admit that Edith is entitled to what her father left her, whether she does or does not make an effort to obtain it. This is a self-evident proposition, and if she has cause to believe that Mrs. Graham intends to keep it from her, the fact that she desires you to do your duty does not admit of being construed into an appearance of unseemly haste or greed. You have, as I understand it, refused to comply with her request, and we can only construe your silence on this point to mean that you are so thoroughly impressed with Mrs. Graham’s apparent honesty that you are ready to accept her every act without questioning it. That you are wrong in this impression is fully proven by father Graham’s placing you in this position to defend his daughter against all possibility of Mrs. Graham’s defeating his will. Whether he was correct or not in his judgment of your ability to withstand her alluring smiles, and firmly do your duty, remains to be seen.”

“I intend to do my duty,” replied Webster, “but I shall have to see some better proofs than your suspicions before I can willingly distrust Mrs. Graham.”

It is too late, thought Arthur; he belongs to the other side.

Mrs. Graham was not a little surprised when she returned home to find that uncle Webster had gone to see Edith, and re-entering her carriage she ordered that it be driven there at once.

“Ah, good morning, Edith,” said Mrs. Graham, as with

her most pleasing smile she entered the room ; “and you, Arthur, I am pleased to see you again ; it has been a long time since I have seen you all. Are you both well ?”

“Very well, thank you,” replied Arthur, as suave in his manner as was Mrs. Graham.

“We have not seen you at the house lately ; have you so readily forgotten your old friends ?” continued Mrs. Graham, with every appearance of friendliness.

“I have been rather busy, and when I return at night I find our home and Edith’s company so agreeable I cannot bear to break away,” replied Arthur, gravely.

“O, yes ; that is always the way with young folks,” replied Mrs. Graham, with a half-suppressed sigh ; “but they soon settle down to the humdrum of actual fact.”

“That may be, but we have not arrived at that point yet,” replied Arthur, quietly.

“No, I suppose not. But, by the way, I have just returned from the lawyers,” said Mrs. Graham, turning to the others, “and he suggests that it is time to begin settling the estate. I believe that everything necessary has been done, and we are now ready to probate the will.”

Ah, thought Arthur, this is what she has had on her mind all the time, and now speaks of it as if it had just occurred to her.

“There is one thing I should like to have done first,” said Edith, quietly.

“And what is that ?” inquired Mrs. Graham, turning sharply, upon her.

“I should like to have the will read. I believe it is customary,” said Edith, doubtfully.

“O, certainly,” said Mrs. Graham, with a sneer, “if you have so much curiosity in such matters. Thank heaven ! I have not.”

Her manner exasperated Arthur to the highest pitch, and smarting under the cruel wrongs he now knew she had inflicted upon Edith for so many years, he turned upon her in righteous indignation, and said :

“No, you have no curiosity now, because you sought and found how well you were provided for by the will just as soon as your husband was in his grave ! There, uncle Webster, is a sample of indecent haste that is worthy of your attention !”

“Who told you that ?” demanded Mrs. Graham, angrily.

“No matter who told me,” replied Arthur, fiercely.

“Deny it and I will produce the proof.”

Tears were her only consolation, and between her choking sobs she said :

“And must I—be insulted in this manner—now that I—have no protector ?”

“I have no desire to insult you,” replied Arthur, “but toward Edith your actions are simply unbearable, and must cease.”

Edith, as was her custom when Mrs. Graham was near her, was trembling in her chair, while Webster sat by, an interested but docile spectator.

Finding that her tears did not accomplish their object, Mrs. Graham quickly brushed them aside, and rising, said to Webster : “We had better be going.” Then turning to Arthur, she said, plaintively : “I do not desire to quarrel with you.”

“Then be just to Edith and the greatest cause will be removed,” replied Arthur, decisively.

“It is my desire to do so,” replied Mrs. Graham, impressively, as she took her leave.

“I wonder what is in store for us now?” said Edith, after they had gone.

“I do not know,” replied Arthur, determinedly, “but I will meet them wherever they choose and as best I can. They have the advantage of position, but we have right on our side and must trust to that.”

“I found,” said Mrs. Graham, when she and Webster were seated in her carriage, “that I had a little time to spare, and concluded we had better close the bargain with Mr. Skinner at once, so I called on him and told him we had concluded to accept his proposition—was that as you desired?”

“Yes, that is perfectly satisfactory to me,” replied Webster. “We talked it over and that was what we decided upon, I think.”

“That is as I understood it,” replied Mrs. Graham, “and as he was anxious to begin, I consented that he should have the will brought into court, and day after to-morrow we are to appear.”

“I am pleased to know it is to be so soon, for I feel that I must get back home,” replied Webster, with a sigh of relief.

“Then what I did suits you?”

“Yes, perfectly.”

“Well, I am rejoiced at that, Webster, for I was a little timid about giving my consent without you were present.”

“I have perfect confidence in your judgment,” replied

Webster, reassuringly ; “but I fear Arthur and Edith intend to make us trouble.”

“O, pshaw ! What can he do ?” replied Mrs. Graham, with evident disgust.

“That is true. At best, he could only worry us.”

“I’ll risk his worrying me while we have the law and power on our side, for if we were to delay giving Edith her money only a short time they would be only too glad to abandon any notions they may now have of making trouble. O, no ; I fear no opposition from that source,” said Mrs. Graham, confident of her position.

“I think we hold the reins,” said Webster, chuckling, “and, as you say, need fear no trouble from them. But from Arthur’s actions I feared he might be inclined to make trouble ; I did not like the way he spoke to you when we were there.”

“O, well, I don’t mind those things as I used to,” said Mrs. Graham, resignedly ; “I have grown accustomed to them.”

“It shows a very bad disposition, to say the least,” continued Webster.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Graham, “but I have seen so much of it that I do not mind it now.”

The next morning Arthur received word from Mr. Blood that he had been called upon to file the will in court.

“What shall we do about it ?” said Arthur, after Edith had finished reading the note.

“I would advise you to see Mr. Blood, and have him watch them,” replied Edith, earnestly.

Arthur placed the note in his pocket and started for Mr. Blood’s office. Entering, he said :

“Mr. Blood, we have decided to have you watch this matter for my wife. I feel an uneasiness that I cannot explain. The more I think about it, the more I believe this to be the proper course.”

“All right,” replied Mr. Blood. “I will enter her appearance, and hereafter they can take no step without first notifying me.”

“That is what I want,” said Arthur, earnestly; “for Mrs. Graham’s words—‘I will be accountable to no other living man’—ring in my ears yet, and it seems to me that if you have to be notified each time she attempts to do anything, she comes pretty close to being accountable to Edith. But why was she so anxious to impress me with the idea that she would not be accountable?”

“It is very plain to me that she intended to carry this business with a high hand,” replied Mr. Blood, “and this was her warning to you not to interfere.”

“Well, you attend to it, Mr. Blood, and we will see what her warning amounts to,” said Arthur, greatly relieved by his assurances.

Mrs. Graham was somewhat in doubt as to how Webster would act in regard to her award, and as she felt that any mention of it by her would only tend to arouse his suspicions in regard to it, she wisely decided that it would be best for him to first hear of it in the bustle and excitement of their preparations to enter court. She therefore decided to go with him, on the appointed day, to Mr. Skinner’s office in time to have the matter settled before the opening of the court; so entering, she said:

“Mr. Skinner, this is Webster Graham, the executor of



my husband's will, and you had best explain to him as you have to me the formal proceedings we shall have to go through."

"They are, in brief," replied Mr. Skinner, in a bustling, off-hand manner, "the filing of the will in court, proof of heirship of the daughter, appointing of appraisers to place a value upon the personal property, the allowance of the widow's award, and issuing of letters of administration to yourself and Mrs. Graham. These are merely the matters of routine business that will occur, and will hardly need your presence except for advice as to whom the appraisers should be; the other matters I can handle with very little trouble."

"He knows best," suggested Mrs. Graham, "and we had better leave these matters to him, had we not, Webster?"

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly," replied the now thoroughly dazed old gentleman, to whom the disposal of these weighty matters in so unceremonious a manner, by Mr. Skinner, raised him in his estimation just in proportion as their importance diminished in his.

"I think I understand you," said Mr. Skinner, with a knowing look at Mrs. Graham, "and we had better go over to the court room now, so that we will be ready when court opens."

"He seems to thoroughly understand his business," said Mrs. Graham, as she and Webster were seated in the court room watching Mr. Skinner in his preparations.

"Yes, he is a pretty sharp one," replied Webster.

"And the picture of honesty," suggested Mrs. Graham.

"O, he is honest enough, no doubt ; but we must look out for his charges," replied Webster, ever on the alert to save the pennies while the thousands were slipping out of his reach unnoticed.

"O, that is all arranged," replied Mrs. Graham, confidently ; "he cannot charge us more than the forty dollars."

"Is the will of Stewart Graham in court ?" asked Judge Winters from the bench.

"It is, your Honor," replied Mr. Skinner.

"Are the executors present ?"

"They are ; and here is the proof of heirship of the daughter and the other documents relating to the case."

"You have examined them, I suppose ?"

"I have."

"Then let them be shown to the attorney representing the daughter."

Mrs. Graham looked at Uncle Webster in utter astonishment. Up to this point the proceedings had been to her liking, but now an unlooked-for element had crept in and placed her position in uncertainty.

"What does this mean?" demanded Mrs. Graham of Mr. Skinner, as Mr. Blood quietly advanced and took up the papers.

"Your daughter's attorney, I believe," said Mr. Skinner, composedly.

"She's not my daughter!" said Mrs. Graham, indignantly. "What business has she to interfere ? Why don't you demand those papers from Mr. Blood ? He has no right to them."

“Yes, as the daughter’s attorney he is entitled to examine all the papers and object to them if he desires ; and I fear that is what he is going to do in regard to the award.”

Mrs. Graham flushed with indignation, and found it hard to keep her seat ; but when Mr. Blood, after finishing his perusal of the papers, arose, she was all attention to catch his every word.

“Your Honor,” began Mr. Blood, “I am somewhat surprised at the contents of some of these papers, especially as they are presented in connection with this will, with the provisions of which they are in direct opposition ; and if the widow respects the will of her deceased husband, or if she desires to be just, she cannot make these claims upon this estate. This is true as relates to the exact wording of the will. As to the wishes of Mr. Graham, I can say that I drew this will, and I know that it was to avoid just such claims as this that he, after giving her one-third of his estate, inserted the clause—‘in lieu of all dower rights or other claims which she may have in and to my estate’—and unless wiser counsels prevail and this claim is withdrawn, I, as the attorney for the daughter, shall advise her to resist so unjust a claim to the full extent of the law.”

Had a thunderbolt shot into their midst it could not have more unsettled the three against whom it was directed.

Mr. Skinner was for the moment nonplussed and ill at ease ; he could not find words for a reply.

Mrs. Graham and Webster both felt that Mr. Blood was the cause of all the trouble—Webster, because he innocently believed the law would only permit what was right

to be done ; Mrs. Graham, because she knew that without Mr. Blood, Edith would not have known of it until too late.

“ There is no doubt in the mind of the court,” said Judge Winters, rising, “ that the testator desired his widow to receive only the amount that he gives her in his will ; but if, against his expressed wishes, the widow demands her award, I can see no way to prevent it. Knowing this, if the widow desires to take this award, and under these circumstances, I must set it off to her ”

“ We would be pleased to have you appoint the appraisers, and the executors suggest that these be the persons selected,” said Mr. Skinner, who had now regained his composure, and he handed Judge Winters the names of the three whom they had decided upon.

“ If they are not objected to,” said Judge Winters, “ I will appoint these three to act as the appraisers of the personal property, and to decide upon the amount of the widow’s award.”

“ They are satisfactory to me,” replied Mr. Blood ; I know two of them very well ; but the third one—who is he ? ”

“ He is my clerk,” replied Mr. Skinner.

“ Well, I can’t say that I approve of that,” said Mr. Blood, doubtfully ; “ however, the other two will keep him straight.”

“ We would like the letters of administration to be issued to the executors,” continued Mr. Skinner.

“ It has come to my notice that the testator’s brother is not a resident of this State,” said Judge Winters, “ and if

such is the case, he cannot act as an executor of this will."

"That is too bad!" said Mrs. Graham, turning to Webster; "I shall miss you so much!"

"I feel greatly relieved," whispered Webster, "and you can carry it on just as well without me."

"Your Honor," said Mr. Blood, rising hastily, "if you will allow me to argue a case after the decision is made against me, I would like to say that Mr. Graham placed his brother in this position for a purpose: that purpose was to defend the daughter, and others interested, against any acts of his widow that might be detrimental to them. Whether this was, or was not, a wise act on his part, would seem to be fully answered by her acts here; and if I thought that I could by any means induce your Honor to reconsider your decision, I would be well pleased to lay the whole case before you, for I deem it a most important matter that Webster Graham be accepted as an executor."

When Mrs. Graham and her attorney had plotted the overthrow of Webster they had not foreseen the effect that Mr. Blood's presence would have, and her whispered words of condolence to Webster when it was announced that he could not be accepted as an executor was all in conformity to a pre-arranged plan; but now, almost without her knowledge of the source, she was being worried by Arthur through Mr. Blood's earnest advocacy of Webster's cause, which forced the conspirators to either show their friendship or openly oppose him.

"I should very much like to see Webster Graham an executor, and would urge that he be accepted, were it not for the fact that the court has given his opinion adversely,

and there is now no appeal," said Mr. Skinner, under the promptings of Mrs. Graham.

"If I were certain that he would be present when needed, I would consent to his acting as an executor, as there now seems to be no opposing voice," said Judge Winters, looking inquiringly at Mr. Skinner.

Mrs. Graham scowled darkly at Mr. Blood as she realized that he had again defeated their plans:

"He says he would like to be excused, but if it is decided as best that he be accepted, he will be here as often as necessary," replied Mr. Skinner, reluctantly.

"Webster Graham will act as one of the executors," said Judge Winters. "Is that all, Mr. Skinner?"

"That is all."

"Call the next case," said Judge Winters, as the executors arose to leave.

## CHAPTER IX.

### DIAMOND CUTS DIAMOND.

Arthur was busily engaged, and all unconscious of these scenes, when, to his surprise, Mrs. Graham suddenly appeared before him, and in breathless excitement, asked :

“What does all this mean, Arthur? Why have you done this?”

Not quite as ignorant as he seemed, for he quickly surmised that she had unexpectedly encountered Mr. Blood, he asked :

“To what do you refer?”

“Why this man—this lawyer that has been shadowing us all the afternoon in the court room.”

“O, you must mean Mr. Blood,” said Arthur, quietly.

“Yes, Mr. Blood,” replied Mrs. Graham, impetuously.

“O, we had him there just to watch the proceedings, and report to us,” said Arthur, indifferently. You see, Mrs. Graham, this was our only recourse after you decided that you would be accountable to ‘no living man.’”

“But what is the necessity for his being present?” demanded Mrs. Graham. “Why do you incur this expense? Mr. Skinner is your attorney as much as ours. Now, Arthur, will you not discharge this man and stop this fighting against the law?”



“The fact that his presence makes you uneasy and that you insist upon his discharge is the best reason I can give you why we should retain him,” replied Arthur, with a quiet smile.

“You need have no fears that we would or could harm you, Arthur,” said Mrs. Graham, earnestly; “and if we desired to, the law would prevent us from doing so.”

“And you need have no fears that Mr. Blood can harm you, Mrs. Graham, for if you do right he cannot interfere; but if you desire to do that which is wrong, then, most assuredly, we need him, and shall keep him where he can prevent it, even against your wishes.”

“Then you will not discharge him and stop all this trouble?” demanded Mrs. Graham, excitedly.

“I can see no good reason for doing so,” replied Arthur, firmly.

“You may see hereafter why you should have done so,” replied Mrs. Graham, as, baffled and ill at ease, she returned to her carriage, where timid Webster Graham sat anxiously awaiting her return.

“What did he say?” began Webster, as Mrs. Graham took her seat beside him.

“O, he is determined in his course,” replied Mrs. Graham, in a voice that showed no emotion, “and will not discharge his lawyer, even though I pointed out to him the certainty that his course must result in trouble and expense to him.”

Webster made no reply, and but little more was said as they journeyed homeward. Mrs. Graham felt she was on dangerous ground. If Webster should share Arthur’s views,

and it should come to his notice that she had made the attempt to have Judge Winters reject him, it would be a serious matter for the success of her plans ; and if the relatives should hear of it, what view would they take of her course in demanding more than the will gave her ? She could but confess to herself the probability that they would agree with Arthur, for it was to their interest to do so ; for if she had been defeated in her attempt to obtain her award, they, of course, would have been the gainers as well as Edith. How best to approach Webster so as to gain him over to her side, was the problem that kept her thoughts busy until they reached home. But her keen judgment and plausible arguments did not forsake her now ; and when she alighted from her carriage her plans were made, and she ready for the herculean task of convincing Webster, against his own interest and with all the facts against her, that she was in the right.

“Because Edith is not satisfied with her father’s will and has determined to fight against it, it seems unjust that the estate must bear the expense of their foolishness,” began Mrs. Graham, as she laid aside her wrappings and returned to the room where Webster was sitting.

This was a matter that had not as yet been considered by him, and, as his answer proved, the suggestion of it did Mrs. Graham credit for her judgment.

“If Arthur and Edith think they are going to have a circus, and the estate pay the bills, they are sadly mistaken. I have seen too much of law in my time to be easily fooled by children now,” replied Webster, determinedly.

“O, I do not mean that they expect their lawyer will be

paid by the estate ; but in their efforts to break the will they will not only have to spend their own money, but will cause the estate to spend large sums in defending the will against their efforts to break it."

"They will never succeed in that, let me tell you, or my name is not Webster Graham."

Well, I am sure of him, thought Mrs. Graham,—now for the others.

"I was thinking that if Arthur was to gain the confidence of his uncle Ralph's family by a plausible story, they might believe him, and, not rightly understanding the case, be induced by him to oppose us."

"O, he would have no influence with them ; why he is only a boy," replied Webster with a sneer.

"That is very true. But suppose that Mr. Blood should dictate a letter for him, could he not make falsehood appear like the truth to them ? And would it not be much better for us to inform them exactly how the case is, than to run this risk ?"

"Well, if that is so, you had better do it and set the matter at rest," replied Webster, who was only too anxious to avoid all unnecessary work.

"But that is just what I want you to do, as your judgment would have much more weight with them than mine," said Mrs. Graham, patronizingly. "And you must not forget the difference in our relationship to them, which is an important factor in so delicate a matter as this."

"But I would hardly know what to write," replied Webster, greatly perplexed.

"You were present this afternoon and heard what transpired ?"

“ Yes, but I hardly understood what was said,” replied Webster, doubtfully.

“ Well, you write and I will dictate,” said Mrs. Graham, hardly able to repress her smiles at the success of her ruse.

So, in the handwriting of uncle Webster, Mrs. Graham wrote :

“ MY DEAR SISTER LUCY :

“ In settling the estate of our brother, we had hoped to have as little publicity and scandal as possible ; but for some unaccountable reason Edith has employed a lawyer and begun proceedings to break her father’s will, hoping thereby to obtain all her father’s property, including the portion that he left to you and your children. To keep her from doing this will require a large expenditure of money, and result in a great delay in settling the estate ; and should she succeed, you would all be defrauded of that which rightfully belongs to you. Both Mrs. Graham and I join in the request that you will not in any way encourage her, or lend your influence to her, in so unjust a proceeding. She will, no doubt, write you most plausible excuses for her actions, and I write you this in order that you may fully understand the matter, and the more readily comprehend their purposes.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ WEBSTER GRAHAM.”

“ What could I have done without your advice and aid ?” said Mrs. Graham, resuming her conversation when the letter was finished. “ And when I think how nearly successful Edith was in her attempt to have Judge Winters reject you, it makes me shudder !”

“ And did Edith do that ?” inquired Webster, indignantly.

“Who else could it be, Webster? It was as much a part of her plan as the other. You would not believe me the other day when I told you how her love of money had grown upon her; but a few more lessons like these you have received to-day will soon convince you; and if I were left alone with no one to advise and counsel with me while every one’s hand is against me, my fate would indeed be sad!” and tears filled her eyes as she continued: “But you have been my protector, and I feel much more thankful than I can express in words. Had you failed me, I would not have had courage to go on.”

“I am not a man that would desert you in times like these,” said Webster, much affected by Mrs. Graham’s apparent sorrow, “and I will go and see Edith and show her where she is wrong; and when she sees it as we do, she will discharge that lawyer, and we will have an end of this trouble. For this lawyer is the cause of all this mischief; I feel certain that he is. He wants to make a large fee out of this estate, and gives her bad advice in order that he may appear to earn it. I’ll go and see her and straighten out the matter very quickly.”

Edith was sitting by the window awaiting Arthur’s return, when, to her surprise, she saw uncle Webster making his way to the house, and ushering him in, said:—

“Well, uncle, I hardly hoped you would come so soon again; and now you are here you must stay to tea.”

“No, Edith,” replied Webster, “I came to talk with you on a matter of serious importance to us all. You see you have gotten into the clutches of one of these unprincipled lawyers, and naturally he wants to make all the money

he can, and so gives you bad advice in order to make more trouble and larger fees for himself. Now, when he advised you to try and break your father's will, he did not give—”

“But he has not advised me to break father's will,” interrupted Edith.

“Well, it's all the same—when he advised Arthur to try and break the will, he was not giving him the advice that was for your best interests.”

“And you say that Arthur has employed a lawyer to break father's will? O, no!” said Edith, shaking her head, doubtfully. “You must be mistaken; I feel certain that you are.”

“But I was there and saw the whole performance, and I know that is what Mister Lawyer tried to do,” persisted Webster.

“If he did, I am certain it was without Arthur's knowledge or consent,” replied Edith, positively.

“O, that is not likely, Edith; a lawyer would not attempt to do that without the consent of his client.”

“It sounds much more like Mrs. Graham than like Arthur, and I am sure there is a mistake somewhere,” said Edith, firmly. “But here comes Arthur; he can answer for himself.”

“Arthur, you have not allowed Mr. Blood to try and break father's will, have you?” asked Edith, confidently.

“No, certainly I have not!” replied Arthur. “But why do you ask?”

“There!” said Edith, exultingly—“I knew he had not!”

“Who says I have?” demanded Arthur.

“Why, some one has told uncle Webster that Mr. Blood, by your advice, tried to break the will, and I denied it.”

“And you did right !” Then, turning to Webster, he continued : “And, uncle Webster, you can tell any one who makes that charge, that he either does not understand the case or wilfully lies.”

“But I—that is, Mrs. Graham—we—well—we so understood it,” replied Webster, somewhat taken aback by Arthur’s strong denial.

“O, I beg pardon !” said Arthur, quickly, “I did not understand that it was you who made the charge, but may I ask your reasons for so doing ?”

“Well—we were in court,” replied Webster, hesitatingly.

“Yes.”

“Well—we saw—” and Webster hesitated, a little in doubt as to just what he had seen.

“You saw,” said Arthur, impetuously, “an attempt on the part of Mrs. Graham to break the will to the extent of grasping more than she was entitled to by it ; and you also saw Edith’s lawyer protest against her attempted robbery ; but you did not see any action of our attorney that could be tortured into an attempt by him to break father Graham’s will—now, did you ?”

“But Mrs. Graham did not ask for this award,” said Webster, ignoring Arthur’s pointed question. “The law gave it to her and she had nothing to say in the matter.”

“Let us settle one question at a time,” persisted Arthur. “You have made the charge that we, or our attorney, tried to break the will ; I have denied it, and ask you to point out one act that we have done that proves your charge to be justly made.”



“I think we are both a little excited,” said Webster, disappointedly, “and had better drop the subject until some future time.”

“It is a fair question and should receive a straightforward answer,” persisted Arthur. “You can at least say yes or no.”

But Webster was not to be caught so easily. He had called for the purpose of convincing Edith and Arthur that they were wrong, and in that way setting the matter right ; so, with a grim determination, he again returned to the matter of Mrs. Graham’s award.

“You see,” he continued, “you are both mistaken as to Mrs. Graham’s intentions ; and instead of inquiring of her what she intends to do, and why, you suspicion her of dishonesty, and even theft.”

“But Mrs. Graham gave me notice some time ago that she would not be accountable to us,” replied Arthur. “And beside all that, her own acts condemn her ; for if you claim that the law gives her this award, and that she had nothing to do with it, how do you account for the fact that she signed the paper demanding that this award be set off to her.”

“Easy enough : it was only a formal compliance with the law. And, Arthur, if you had only asked for these explanations before you hired that lawyer, much ill-feeling would have been saved, and you would have been better off in many ways. If Mrs. Graham was so disposed, she could delay the settlement of the estate and keep Edith from having her portion for many years. But she is not inclined to do this, even after your opposition and false

charges have been brought to her attention. And now I can assure you that it will be to your interest to discharge this lawyer and stop fighting and making these charges against Mrs. Graham, then, when you are in doubt, go to Mrs. Graham, or write me, and we can soon explain matters satisfactorily."

"Well," said Arthur, complacently, "suppose you begin to explain some of the doubts now. I should like to know, for one thing, how it is that Mrs. Graham can take this much more than father Graham intended her to and not, in spirit, at least, be breaking the will?"

"Well, the law provides that a widow shall have an award, even though it is forgotten in the will," began Webster, uneasily.

"There is no forgetting in this case," replied Arthur, positively, "for your brother particularly specifies that what the will gives her shall be in place of all these claims that she may have by law, and the law would not give her this award if she had not demanded it in writing. You would not consent that she should take the portion that the will gives her, and in excess of that allow her to claim her dower and homestead and widow's award, would you?"

"No, most assuredly not," replied Webster, confidently.

"Then why do you agree to her demand for any one of them? All of them would be given her if there was no will, and she would only have to formally comply with the law, as you call it, to obtain them."

"Well, Mr. Skinner says it amounts to nothing more than a mere matter of form," replied Webster, dejectedly.

“Judge Winters did not so consider it when he said that if the widow demanded this award against her husband’s wishes, as expressed in his will, that he must set it off to her. And now, uncle Webster, explain to me if her signature to that demand means anything more or less than a desire to take what her husband did not wish her to have?”

“It is plain to me, Arthur, that you have no desire to listen to reason in this matter, or to be convinced against your desires,” said uncle Webster, rising; “and as all I could say would not change your determination, I might as well be going.”

“I trust I may always be open to conviction, uncle,” said Arthur, with a slight tinge of sarcasm; “but you have given me no reason for changing my views except your belief in Mrs. Graham’s honesty, while questions on two most important subjects you have declined to answer.”

“I have no desire to farther discuss the matter,” said Webster, sadly; “it would do no good.”

“Well,” said Edith, when her uncle had gone, “that fulfills my prophecy. I told you Mrs. Graham would gain the mastery over him, and keep it.”

“Yes,” replied Arthur, laughing, “he knows no will but hers now; no law but that which she lays down.”

“It almost made me smile when uncle Webster accused you of not listening to reason, while he declined to answer your questions, or listen to anything that did not fit his ideas. But, Arthur, how did you find out so much of what transpired in court?”

“O, Mr. Blood dropped in on me on my way home and related, with much apparent enjoyment, the incidents as

they occurred. He said that in the early part of the proceedings Mrs. Graham sat with a satisfied look on her face and everything seemed to be to her liking ; but when the court ordered that the papers be handed to him for his inspection, her face flushed, and all three were at once thrown into a violent state of excitement. It seems that by some technicality in the law she, by claiming the widow's award, can take several thousand dollars in excess of what the will gives her. The paper by which she demanded this award was one of those handed Mr. Blood, and as he leisurely perused them, the two executors watched him with much anxiety. He then turned to the judge, and in his objections to the filing of this paper lashed her without mercy,—so much so, that at its close, although he decided against us, Judge Winters admitted with biting sarcasm that no woman who respected the wishes of her dead husband would make such a claim ; but if she did, he must allow it."

"I should think she would have felt like sinking through the floor," said Edith, as she realized the force of Judge Winters' rebuke.

"Instead of that, Mr. Blood says that she seemed perfectly indifferent to the disgrace, and complacently smiled when Judge Winters acknowledged that he must allow the claim."

Webster Graham had but little to say on the subject of his expedition to Edith's when, upon his return, he met Mrs. Graham. His strange silence worried her, for she began to doubt him and his constancy as an advocate of her cause. I wonder, she thought, if Edith has changed his feelings instead of he changing hers. I must find out.

"Did you find Edith at home when you called?" began Mrs. Graham, pleasantly.

"Yes, I had no trouble in that respect," answered Webster, moodily.

"You speak of trouble—did you lose your way?" said Mrs. Graham, gayly.

"No," answered Webster, shaking his head.

"Your visit was not very pleasant, I judge."

"In some ways it was, and some not."

"Did you convince Edith of her error?"

"No, not exactly," replied Webster, loth to admit his defeat. "She declared she knew nothing of any attempt to break the will, and when I told her that her lawyer had made the attempt, she was very positive I was mistaken, and on Arthur's return she appealed to him, and of course he confirmed her in her belief and then turned the conversation upon you and your actions."

"And what did he say?" asked Mrs. Graham, uneasily.

"He denounced them as attempts to rob the estate," replied Webster, sadly.

"But you did not believe him?" inquired Mrs. Graham, anxiously.

"Of course I did not. I tried to explain the matter to him and settle this quarrel, but he would not listen to reason."

"So your mission of peace proved a failure?" said Mrs. Graham, smiling at his childlike faith in her sincerity.

"Well, just about," replied Webster, despondingly, "though I trust I sowed some seed that may in time bring them to a proper understanding."

“I am afraid it is good seed on very stony ground. But I have a better recipe than that, and it brings forth its fruit much sooner,” replied Mrs. Graham determinedly. “I will call Arthur to an accounting, attend to the business myself, and allow them no part of the estate until they submit. Does that meet with your approval, Webster?”

“It is a severe remedy, but it may be for the best,” said Webster, doubtfully.

“It is severe, Webster, but not too much so for those who would wilfully waste the entire estate in law suits, besides causing us an endless amount of trouble.”

“No, probably not. But they may give in before long; we cannot tell how soon,” replied Webster, ready to defer the unpleasant business until some future time.

“We can as well afford to wait as they,” replied Mrs. Graham, significantly, as she arose and sought an interview with Bertha.

“I want you to aid me, Bertha,” said Mrs. Graham, as she entered the room where she was sitting and carefully closed the door. “I must crush out this opposition on the part of Edith, and to do this quickly and successfully I must have earnest and intelligent work on your part. She must feel all the pressure we can bring to bear upon her, and nothing must be left undone to force her to abandon this opposition. In a few days the court will be ready to hear and act upon the report of the appraisers, and before that time she must feel the full power of my condemnation.”

“And how can I help you?” asked Bertha, doubtfully.

“In this way,” replied Mrs. Graham, earnestly: “Make

it your business to see as many of Edith's friends as possible ; take the necessary time and use your skill to bring your conversation to bear upon the death of Mr. Graham, and from that, by great care, approach the subject of the settlement of the estate ; this will be the natural course of conversation when once it is rightly directed. Then, with all the skill at your command, see to it that Edith is represented as using her every effort to break her father's will, and with insatiate greed to obtain the whole of the property, even leaving me without enough for my support."

"But is she doing this ?" said Bertha, doubtfully.

"Certainly she is, Bertha ; what else do her actions show than this ?"

"Very well, Mrs. Graham ; when shall I begin ?"

"At the very first opportunity, Bertha ; and when you are engaged in it you must not for a moment forget that it is an undertaking that requires great tact and acuteness. Be careful not to be too urgent in your denunciation of Edith's course, but rather let your friends keep up the conversation, while you make your concessions with just enough reluctance to make you seem to be an unwilling witness, the greater to impress them with the truth of what you are forced to admit. With some you can go farther than with others. These you will readily know by the eagerness with which they listen to and rejoice over each rich and racy bit of news. Some of these may be notorious gossips, and where you know them to be such you can relax your vigilance and care ; but when you meet a lady that does not readily become interested, and whose conversation wanders off to other subjects, you must indeed be wary and act with great-



est caution. These are such well-known facts as to make me feel that I almost insult your judgment by mentioning them ; but I am so anxious that you shall make no false move that I cannot refrain from impressing you with their importance. One friend now will make us many more, and they make others, none of whom will ever think of seeking Edith to know why she has done what she has ; and with one of her sensitive disposition an affront or cool reception is quickly magnified into an army of enemies. This I shall spare no pains to bring to her attention, and with your work well done, and mine accomplished, she will be forced to submit, as she should have done from the first. Remember what I have said, and may success crown your efforts. For myself, I have decided upon a bold move. To-morrow I shall attend the meeting of the church sewing society. I know I shall incur the risk of being thought heartless, but much valuable time can be saved by meeting so many of my chosen friends and there sowing the seed for Edith's harvest of misery. Among them I can find many whom I can rely upon in any emergency, and I have no fears of how my appearance so soon after Mr. Graham's death will be received by them ; while with others, I must run the risk of their opinions, as the opportunity must not be lost."

## CHAPTER X.

### THERE IS NO NEUTRAL GROUND.

True to her resolve, the next day found Mrs. Graham at the appointed place, and upon entering she eagerly sought for some friendly recognition that would relieve her doubts; and it was with pleasure that her eyes alighted upon a bevy of ladies all of whom she numbered among her trusted friends, and making her way toward them, she was at once relieved by their warm-hearted and sympathetic reception.

“I only came for a moment’s stay,” began Mrs. Graham, in response to the numerous requests to lay aside her wrappings; “I felt so lonesome I could not stay away.” And her eyes filled with tears as she continued: “I thought you would excuse the seeming impropriety if you knew how lonesome my home seems to me now.”

“I see no impropriety in your coming,” replied Mrs. Adell. “For my part, I was born too independent of the opinion of strangers to care what they thought, and can trust my friends to be charitable.”

“I do not believe in carrying anything to excess,” interposed Mrs. Gray, quietly, “and I think the mourners of a husband or father are often made uncomfortable by the knowledge that they are subjects for remark if they do not

cry enough, or wear deep enough mourning, or lay it aside too soon, or leave it on too long, and so on to the end of the chapter. For my part, I would rather judge of grief by the evidence of past kindnesses to the dead than by any compliance to rigid rules of custom, and I think Mrs. Graham knows all of us well enough to feel at ease in regard to her appearance here."

"So say we all of us," said sprightly Mrs. Brandon. "We are well pleased, Mrs. Graham, to have you numbered among us once more."

"You are all very kind," replied Mrs. Graham, brushing back the tears, "and I had no fears of your friendship being lost to me by reason of my coming; but all are not so considerate of the feelings of those in deep affliction."

"You must feel the loss of Mr. Graham very much," said sympathetic Mrs. Rivers; "he was a man among a thousand, and your home all the more desolate for that reason."

"You will not think of staying in that large house all alone, will you?" asked Mrs. Adell, trying to change the conversation to more pleasing topics.

"I am in doubt just what to do. If left to choose, I might more easily determine; but with all this trouble coming on me at once, I am sadly in need of advice. I thought when Mr. Graham died that my cup was full to overflowing, but it never rains but it pours, and I find it so in my case."

"That is almost always the case," said Mrs. Rivers, "one misfortune generally follows another, and I do not know of a more desolate condition than to be left alone to battle against the wiles of designing lawyers and faithless friends."

“But it is still worse to have a large estate to manage and no one to turn to for advice and aid,” said Mrs. Adell, who now saw there was no use in trying to turn the course of conversation in any other direction.

“And worse still, if disagreements arise among the persons interested,” replied Mrs. Brandon.

“That is the worst of all,” said Mrs. Graham, sadly; “I can stand all but that.”

“I pity you from the depths of my heart if you have met with that experience,” said Mrs. Gray, earnestly. “I have heard of such cases and had knowledge of one; and while the estate was almost wrecked, it was of but little moment as compared to the hearts that were made to ache. I trust, Mrs. Graham, that you may never have that to go through with.”

“Is it Edith that is causing you trouble?” inquired Mrs. Adell, who now became an interested listener.

“I can hardly say,” replied Mrs. Graham, using her deep-bordered handkerchief with good effect. “I am more inclined to think the fault lies with her lawyer, who has, no doubt, advised her against her best interests.”

“If there is a lawyer mixed up in the affair you can just depend upon it there is trouble ahead,” interposed Mrs. Brandon.

“It is the only way I have to account for her queer actions,” replied Mrs. Graham.

“I would advise you to go to Edith and give her a good motherly talk; show her where this lawyer is leading her, and from what I know of her, she has the good judgment to take it kindly and act wisely,” said Mrs. Gray, with some little earnestness.

"I have already done this," said Mrs. Graham, who now found the conversation to her liking, "and the strangest part of it all is that she positively denied making any effort or having any desire to break her father's will. I then persuaded her uncle to visit her and have her alter her course, but to no purpose; she denied the whole matter, and he left her only after being convinced that his efforts had utterly failed."

"And is Edith really trying to break the will?" inquired Mrs. Adell.

"Well, I want it kept as secret as possible, to avoid scandal, but that is what she has attempted to do," replied Mrs. Graham, confidently.

"Is she likely to succeed?" asked Mrs. Gray.

"That is in doubt—grave doubt, at the best," replied Mrs. Graham, sadly. "But even if she should fail, it would cost the estate a large amount for defense."

"It is unfortunate," said Mrs. Gray, thoughtfully.

"I always considered Mr. Graham a just and kind father, and one who would leave his daughter all that she could rightfully expect," said Mrs. Brandon.

"He was," said Mrs. Graham; "and why Edith should seek to take from me all that the will gives me I cannot understand."

"And has she gone that far?" inquired Mrs. Gray, in astonishment.

"No, not quite," replied Mrs. Graham, hesitatingly; "but if she should succeed, I would be sadly reduced in circumstances. I would not complain if that were all, but she is trying to get what Mr. Graham left to his sister

and her children, which would be of great assistance to her in their education. Now they are liable to lose it all, and thus be kept from acquiring the knowledge that would help them to become useful men and women."

"Edith must have changed greatly since I knew her," said Mrs. Gray.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Graham, sadly, "either the need of money, or a desire to live more elegantly, has changed her wonderfully in the last few months."

"Well, her money will do her no good as far as I am concerned," said Mrs. Adell, "for I shall quietly ignore her."

"If she persists in this course I shall be forced to do the same, though much against my wishes," said Mrs. Gray, quietly.

"I never liked Edith very enthusiastically," said Mrs. Brandon, "so she will lose but little in my estimation."

"I have delayed too long, and must now be going," said Mrs. Graham, hastily; "but I desire to express my thanks for the many kindnesses I have received at your hands, and shall treasure them in my memory when desolate and alone in my home."

"I shall call on you soon," said Mrs. Adell, as she left her at the door.

"So Stewart Graham's widow is out again," said Mrs. Foreman, as she joined the circle of ladies.

"Yes, and an unhappy woman she is," continued Mrs. Gray; "her troubles accumulate like the drifting snow."

"What new trouble besets her now?" inquired Mrs. Foreman.

“O, the daughter is turning heaven and earth to get all the property,” replied Mrs. Brandon, in an off-hand manner; “its the same old story.”

“What is that you say?” said several ladies, turning at once toward Mrs. Brandon.

“I was just telling Mrs. Foreman that the same old story was being lived over again: father dies,—widow and children fight over the property until the lawyers get it all,—widow and children mourn their foolishness while the gaunt wolf shadows the door.”

“Well, you have an entertaining way of telling stern facts,” said Mrs. Gray, forced to laugh in spite of herself.

“Did Mrs. Graham tell you that?” said one of the ladies, gathering up her work and taking a seat close by Mrs. Brandon.

“Well, not in just those words,” replied Mrs. Brandon, laughing, “but that is what it amounts to, Mrs. Wallingford.”

“It is strange,” replied that lady, thoughtfully; “for I saw Edith but a few days ago and she said nothing to me of this matter.”

“And good reason why she did not; she is the one that is causing all the trouble,” continued Mrs. Adell.

“Have you heard what Edith has to say?” inquired Mrs. Wallingford.

“No, I have not; but no one here would dare question Mrs. Graham’s veracity, especially as she told what she did very reluctantly.”

“Prejudice,” continued Mrs. Wallingford, “sometimes blinds the judgment, so that the question of veracity is not



a proper test. I have known Edith Graham for years, and cannot readily believe this of her. There is not a lady here but will bear testimony that she is a daughter of whom her father could well be proud,—mild and unassuming, as ladylike in every particular as the most critical could demand, and without an enemy in the world, so far as I know.”

“O, you take the matter altogether too seriously,” interposed Mrs. Adell.

“But is it not a serious matter to make these charges against any young woman without first being sure they are well founded?” inquired Mrs. Wallingford.

“How would you assure yourself that they were true?” confidently inquired Mrs. Brandon.

“By hearing both sides,” replied Mrs. Wallingford, quietly.

“Ha, ha! And if you found that it was stoutly denied, what then?” inquired Mrs. Brandon, with a knowing look at the other ladies.

“I should say that at least it was an open question, and wait for further proof before I would condemn her,” said Mrs. Wallingford, earnestly.

Mrs. Gray had been an interested listener to whom the last words of Mrs. Wallingford carried quick conviction.

“I am surprised when I think that I allowed my convictions to so nearly overcome my better judgment,” said Mrs. Gray. “What Mrs. Wallingford has just said is only too true; no one should convict another without first giving them a chance to defend themselves.”

This was too sentimental for Mrs. Brandon, and she with several of the other ladies formed a new circle of conversation and were now eagerly discussing this latest bit of scandal.

“I have done good service to-day,” said Mrs. Graham, entering the room where Bertha was sitting. “I went to the society and placed the leaven where it will soon leaven the whole lump. And now, Bertha, you must tell me what has been your success.”

“I am afraid I am not a good advocate,” answered Bertha, doubtfully; “I did not meet with flattering success.”

Mrs. Graham’s brow contracted into a frown of displeasure as Bertha continued :

“I saw two or three of Edith’s friends, and one in particular, Miss Wallingford, would not listen to a word against Edith.”

“Did she know anything of what had transpired in court?” inquired Mrs. Graham, anxiously.

“She would not talk of the subject for any length of time,” replied Bertha, “and I could not form an opinion of how much she did or did not know.”

“Did she say anything against me?”

“Not a word,” quickly answered Bertha.

“Then she has not heard,” said Mrs. Graham, positively; “for in a case like this there is no neutral ground. When she has had time to think over what you have told her she will form an opinion, and if adverse to Edith it will soon show itself, and if she did not express an opinion on the matter you can rest assured that she is not committed to Edith’s cause. But you may leave her to me and I will

bring her around in good time. Her mother was at the sewing society and will no doubt hear of it, and they will talk it over, and I will call and see them in a few days. Whom did you see beside her?"

"I called on Mrs. Bartley and had quite a long talk with her. She seemed to be quite interested in the turn affairs had taken, but would say nothing against Edith."

"O, that is not necessary," replied Mrs. Graham, quickly. "She will do us much good, and among a class of persons whom we would find it hard to reach. She is very conservative in all she says, but for that very reason what she does say has great weight with those she talks to. The fact that you interested her in the subject at all is quite a victory."

And thus Mrs. Graham, like an experienced politician, measured her forces, and knew at the end of Bertha's recital of her experiences just where to place her hand upon those she could trust to still farther serve her ends.

When Bertha finished her report, Mrs. Graham said, with a smile of approval. "Your work was not so unprofitable as you imagined. Hereafter when you are out upon this mission I shall feel more at ease. And now I must see Edith's aunt Hattie and see that she understands Edith's actions, while you continue your work here and there as opportunity offers."

Mrs. Graham lost no time, and the next day found her comfortably seated in aunt Hattie's home, eagerly recounting the incidents attendant upon her first appearance in court.

"I am almost heart-broken," continued Mrs. Graham,

amid her tears. "My dear husband's death crushed me to the earth, and I was nearly wild with sorrow; but had I then known what I should be forced to suffer, I would willingly have been buried by his side. O, it is more than I can bear!" and Mrs. Graham gave way to a paroxysm of wild and uncontrollable grief.

Aunt Hattie sat with a sad and sympathizing look upon her face, waiting until the force of Mrs. Graham's grief had somewhat abated, when she inquired.

"Has Edith really hired a lawyer?"

"Yes—she—has," replied Mrs. Graham, between her sobs.

"I cannot understand it," said aunt Hattie, thoughtfully; "it seems so unlike her to do that. Are you sure it is not Arthur that has done this without her knowledge?"

"No, she knows all about it, and is very defiant in her course."

"I shall go and see her, and as my dead sister's only child, shall give her some much needed advice," said aunt Hattie, positively.

"You will find your time is wasted, and will be fortunate if in her resentment she does not insult you," said Mrs. Graham, sadly.

"O, you must not speak so of Edith!" replied aunt Hattie, deprecatingly. "She means well enough, but is no doubt laboring under a mistaken idea that you desire to injure her. You know that you have never gotten along well together, and it is but natural that she should take measures to protect herself if she has been deluded into

thinking that you intend to harm her ; but when I point out these facts to her, she will no doubt see the matter in another light. I do not approve of her hiring a lawyer under any circumstances, for that always means fight."

"It would take a great load off my mind if you were to see her and convince her that she is in the wrong, but I have no hope that you can succeed," said Mrs. Graham, despondingly.

"I think I can," replied aunt Hattie, confidently.

"I would think so, too, if I had not tried and failed," was Mrs. Graham's reassuring answer.

"But I may have more influence with her," persisted aunt Hattie.

"You have, no doubt, but after I failed so utterly I had uncle Webster visit her and tell her that she did wrong in trying to break the will, that her father was a just man and his will dealt justly with her, but it had no effect upon her," said Mrs. Graham, despondingly, "and she almost insulted him before he gave up his efforts to reclaim her."

"Has she attempted to break the will?" asked aunt Hattie, in astonishment.

"Certainly, that is just what she hired that lawyer for ; what use could he be to her otherwise ?"

"If Edith has done that," said aunt Hattie, slowly, "I shall not go near her ; and while I must always love her as the only child of my dead sister, I shall have as little to do with her as possible."

"It was not my intention to worry you with my burdens, and I had no intention of saying as much as I have ; but you must know that after I have had these things worrying

me so long, without a friend to go to, it is a great relief to find some one upon whom I can depend. And I now see that what I have told you is so unaccountably strange as to almost make you doubt its truth, and I would suggest that you see my brother Webster and have him confirm it before you condemn Edith," said Mrs. Graham, sadly, as she arose to take her leave.

Aunt Hattie extended her hand, while the sympathetic tears found their way to her eyes, as she said :

"Your deep affliction finds a too ready sympathy in my heart for me to doubt you ; and while in justice to Edith I should listen to what Webster has to say, I do not need him to convince me that Edith has disgraced her father's name and greatly wronged you."

"While I am in the mood," thought Mrs. Graham, as she entered her carriage, "I had better call on Miss Ashton and set her against Edith. Here I will need all my powers of persuasion. She is Edith's closest friend and I shall have no easy task ; but if I succeed, the greater will be my victory."

"The servant must have made a mistake, Mrs. Graham," began Miss Ashton as she entered the parlor where Mrs. Graham was sitting. "I knew you called to see mamma, but as the servant was positive you asked for myself I thought I would come, more especially as mamma is not at home."

"I desired to see you as well as your mother," replied Mrs. Graham, greatly pleased to find that their conversation would not be interrupted, and smiling pleasantly, she continued : "And while I appreciate her society, and am very

sorry she is not at home, I dare say I shall hardly miss her, while I have you as my entertainer."

"If we had not been neighbors for so many years, I should consider that as idle flattery," replied Miss Ashton, piquantly.

"With all my sorrow, I can ill afford to spend time in flattery," replied Mrs. Graham, earnestly.

"That reminds me that I have heard you were meeting with unexpected difficulties in regard to the estate," said Miss Ashton.

"Yes, unexpected indeed," replied Mrs. Graham, with a sigh; "but how did you hear of it?"

"I met Mrs. Adell at the party last evening, and she told me just enough to make me interested, and then dropped the subject; but I could hardly believe all that she said about Edith."

"It seems too strange to be true," replied Mrs. Graham, thoughtfully. "But I am surprised that it has become known so soon."

"From what I gathered from Mrs. Adell," replied Miss Ashton, "I understood that it was a well-known fact, and I intended to drop in on Edith and find out about it."

"If you would see Edith," said Mrs. Graham, earnestly, "and urge her to stop trying to break her father's will, you would confer a lasting obligation on me and save the disgrace of so much scandal."

"I will willingly do so; for, as her bridesmaid, I am privileged to participate in family matters, am I not?" said Miss Ashton, laughing.

"I think she would take it kindly of you," replied Mrs. Graham, quietly.



“Well, if I am to be your messenger of peace you must give me full instructions. First, how did the trouble begin?” queried Miss Ashton, assuming a look of serious wisdom.

“That I can hardly tell,” replied Mrs. Graham, sadly. “Its first beginning dates back many years. When I first knew Edith she was a wild, untutored child, who would bear no restraint, and displayed only enmity toward those who desired to lead her into different ways. I made it my life’s chief duty to study her so thoroughly that I could understand her motives and thereby the more readily cause her to change her ways.”

“But I never saw any disposition of this kind in Edith,” said Miss Ashton, somewhat surprised by Mrs. Graham’s statements.

“No, I dare say you did not,” replied Mrs. Graham, quickly; “you were both young and they more readily escaped your attention then than they would now. Beside this, she improved greatly under my management, so that I had great hopes of all these bad traits entirely disappearing; but one very grave fault resisted all my efforts: she retained her disposition to speak ill of even her best friends, which often caused me much concern and many times placed me in a very disagreeable position because of my efforts to shield her from the results of her unwise course. Now, I tell you this with much reluctance, and only for the purpose of more fully making you understand the exact condition of affairs; for if you do not succeed I must give up in despair, as you are now the only one that I have any hope of being able to influence her to turn back from the course she is pursuing.”

"I shall try to succeed with her, and believe I can," replied Miss Ashton, earnestly.

"This one trait, as I have just said," continued Mrs. Graham, "has caused me many pangs of remorse, and as I do not wish to bring others into the discussion, I will content myself with using your case as an example, for I know that I can trust you to overlook it and forgive her. At one time I feared that you might hear of some remarks she made against you, and your friendship be lost to her; but I managed to hush the matter up so completely that you never heard of it."

"But what reason has Edith to say anything against me, Mrs. Graham?" inquired Miss Ashton, in great surprise. "I have always been on most friendly terms with her, and can hardly believe your charges against her."

"That is the strangest part of her actions, replied Mrs. Graham, sadly. But you must not take this to heart, for you remember that I am only using your case as an illustration, to make you more fully understand the cause of this trouble."

"But what did she say?" inquired Miss Ashton, anxiously, "you have not told me yet."

"I think I had better let the matter drop," said Mrs. Graham, doubtfully. "What I tell you seems to make you feel antagonistic to Edith instead of more desirous of reclaiming her. This is too great a risk for me to incur."

"You need have no fear of that," replied Miss Ashton, flushing slightly; "if you are my friend you will trust me."

"I am so anxious to have this last resort prove successful that I am possibly a little too cautious," replied Mrs.

Graham, sweetly ; “ but as you have such good judgment, I shall feel safe in telling you all that occurred. It was, if I remember rightly, but a short time before her marriage, that she was speaking of you to Miss Wallingford, who was visiting her, that in the course of her conversation she spoke of the arrangements by which you had been decided upon to act as her bridesmaid, and that if you had not already been spoken to about it she would not consent to your acting, for the reason that she had but recently found out some matters of indiscretion that reflected upon you to such an extent as to make her certain that your character might place her in an embarrassing position because of your acting as her best friend at her marriage. I was sitting in a remote part of the room and they were holding their conversation in a very confidential tone, so that most of what they said I did not hear , but as she became more interested in her subject her words became more easily heard, and when I heard her say that your appearance at parties was often almost indecent because of powder and paint and your low-necked dresses, I thought it was time to interfere, and did so possibly in too hasty a manner, for I admit that I felt quite indignant that she should so far forget your friendship as to speak of you in this manner, and especially to so much of a gossip as I believe Miss Wallingford to be. After correcting Edith, I followed Miss Wallingford to the door, and begged her for the sake of our family to never repeat what Edith had told her ; and while I was for some time in constant fear that she might not accede to my request, I am now inclined to believe that she will never mention it, and that you have no cause for alarm ;

but you can readily understand my position when you know that this was only one of many just such occurrences. When I returned to the room where Edith was sitting, I found that my words had made her my lasting enemy, and for this one act alone she has never forgiven me. Now she sees a chance to be revenged, and will no doubt improve it, even though in ruining me she should waste the whole estate. To prevent her from pursuing this unwise course, I now have only one hope, and that is, that you will wisely and discreetly present the case to her so that she will abandon her present purpose."

Stunned and completely overcome by Mrs. Graham's revelations, Miss Ashton sat more like a statue than the young and vivacious woman that she was when Mrs. Graham first began her story ; and when it was finished, she could not reply,—her injured feelings and resentment toward Edith as the cause of her misery did not admit of adequate expression in words.

Mrs. Graham fully realized that this case would test her powers of persuasion more thoroughly than they had ever been, and came nearer to doubting her ability to succeed than ever before ; and when she found her way so readily opened by Miss Ashton's freedom in speaking of these matters, she rejoiced that her labors had been made that much easier. When she had finished her story, she awaited the exhibition of its effect, while she leaned back in her chair and rapidly canvassed the conversation to detect any errors that might unwittingly have crept in, and it was with a feeling of exultation that she found it without a flaw. As Miss Ashton made no sign of replying, Mrs. Graham at last broke

the silence by inquiring : “ When will you find it convenient to see Edith, Miss Ashton, and make the trial ? ”

With an evident effort, Miss Ashton aroused herself enough to say : “ I shall have nothing more to do with her, and never wish to see her again. ”

“ And why ? ” asked Mrs. Graham, with well-feigned astonishment.

“ What you have told me is a sufficient reason, ” replied Miss Ashton, now pale and trembling.

“ Have I then blasted my only hope ? ” said Mrs. Graham, despairingly. “ O, why did I tell you all ! ”

Mrs. Graham’s well-feigned misery touched a sympathetic chord in Miss Ashton’s heart, and she replied :

“ I feel that I am under great obligation to you for what you have told me, Mrs. Graham, but I must decline to give you my aid in this matter ; my feelings toward her have changed, and I could now do you no good. ”

“ I cannot urge you against your wishes, ” said Mrs. Graham, sadly, as she arose to take her leave, “ but it is a great disappointment to me. ”

“ I regret it as much as any one, and desire to assure you of my lasting friendship, but this I cannot do, ” said Miss Ashton, earnestly, as she followed Mrs. Graham to the door.

“ I do not doubt your friendship in the least, ” replied Mrs. Graham, impressively, “ but it was my last hope. Please remember me to your mother, and tell her I was greatly disappointed to have found her not at home, ” and Mrs. Graham, with a smile of victory, made her way to her carriage.

“Well, Bertha,” began Mrs. Graham, in great glee, as she entered the house, “I have been more successful in my efforts to-day than I had any hopes of. I have set both aunt Hattie and Miss Ashton against Edith, and the best of it is, they took all I had to say against her in the most kindly manner, and gave me assurances of their lasting friendship.”

“And I had only to confirm rumors already brought to the notice of those I called on,” said Bertha, “and I found this much more easy than beginning the conversation on the subject.”

“I think we need have no fears now, Bertha, and Edith must be informed of this condition of affairs. I shall write her a letter, giving her an intimation of what is in store for her, and then she will complete the work by seeking to find if it is true. When she does find it, she will be crushed by the weight of condemnation that will close about her, and leave me free to carry out my own sweet will,” and Mrs. Graham snapped her fingers in anticipation of the victory already assured.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A BITTER AND RELENTLESS WARFARE.

Mrs. Wallingford left the sewing society greatly troubled with what she had heard, while her knowledge of Edith's relations with the present Mrs. Graham, added to her excellent judgment, had quickly induced her to doubt the correctness of Mrs. Graham's statements, and she would have sought Edith at once for further information were it not that she disliked to appear to be prying into her private affairs ; so in the evening, when she met her husband and daughter, she determined to lay before them what she had heard and ask their advice as to her proper course.

"I met with a queer experience to-day," began Miss Wallingford, as she entered the room where her father and mother were sitting. "While mother was at the sewing society I was favored with a visit from Bertha Locke, Mrs. Graham's companion."

"And was that a queer experience ?" inquired her father.

"No, not her visit so much as what I now believe to have been her object in coming. I have never felt very well acquainted with her, and naturally our conversation was somewhat formal, but had not progressed very far before she introduced the subject of Mr. Graham's death. Here,



thought I, is neutral ground, upon which we can meet, and I at once became interested. Now comes the queer part of it. I soon found that her conversation tended more directly to Edith's private affairs than to Mr. Graham's death, and I could not direct it into another channel before she conveyed the intelligence that Edith was making trouble for Mrs. Graham, who was liable to be left nearly destitute if Edith succeeded in her law suit."

"Have you not transposed the names?" asked her father, with a knowing look at his good wife.

"Aha!" said Mrs. Wallingford, so earnestly as to make them both look up, "I think I see the whole plan now; and as this has been turned into an experience meeting, I will take my turn and tell you another queer story. I saw Mrs. Graham, much to my surprise, at the sewing society this afternoon. She was holding a very animated and confidential conversation with a circle of friends. When she left, I had almost forgotten her presence, when my attention was attracted by a remark let fall by Mrs. Brandon, and upon inquiry I found that Mrs. Graham had sown the seed of discord and it was rapidly bearing fruit; even the mild and kind-hearted Mrs. Gray was very much inclined to condemn Edith without inquiring if Mrs. Graham was an unprejudiced witness. I called their attention to this, and Mrs. Gray at once acknowledged the injustice of so doing, but she was the only one."

"Well," said Mr. Wallingford, "I should say that my experience would teach that as old neighbors and friends of Edith's mother it is our duty to inform her of this and place her on her guard; for if I am not mistaken, this is

the beginning of a conspiracy that, before it is ended, will try Edith's fortitude and make her feel the need of advice from her true friends."

"You have answered my question before it was asked," said Mrs. Wallingford, "for I intended to ask your advice upon this very matter; and now, if you think best, I shall see Edith as soon as possible."

"I would do so, most assuredly," replied Mr. Wallingford, decisively.

"Then I shall go," and true to her word, the next day found her at Edith's house.

"Would you resent it, Edith, if I were to inquire into your relations with Mrs. Graham?" began Mrs. Wallingford.

"Not in the least; I have nothing to conceal," replied Edith, "and have done nothing that I am ashamed of."

"I have heard that you were trying to break your father's will; is this true?" inquired Mrs. Wallingford, anxiously.

Edith's face flushed as she replied: "It is false! I am perfectly satisfied with the will, and have no desire to break it, nor have I made any attempt to do so. Who told you that I had?"

"Mrs. Graham circulated the story at the sewing society," said Mrs. Wallingford, quietly, "and Bertha told it to my daughter."

"Mrs. Graham should be the last person to make a charge like that," said Edith, indignantly; "if any one has attempted to break the will she is the one."

"That is what Mr. Wallingford thinks. But tell me, how did this trouble arise?"

“By her attempting to take more than she is entitled to, and then objecting to my employing a lawyer to protect me,” replied Edith, in an injured tone.

“But, Edith, if your father left a will how can she take more than she is entitled to—does the law allow her to do this?”

“By a technicality, I believe it does,” replied Edith, sadly.

“That seems strange; but never mind, I can ask Mr. Wallingford about that. Now, Edith, are you sure you fully understand this just as it is?”

“My lawyer tells us so, but I know nothing beyond that except that Arthur confirms what he says.”

“Your lawyer might be interested in misleading you, Edith, but if Arthur has inquired into it that would seem to be good evidence;—do you know that he has done this?”

“No, I do not know that he has. But, Mrs. Wallingford, one would naturally think you had spent much time and thought on this subject,” said Edith, laughing.

“I have done so, Edith, but I can assure you it has not been from idle curiosity. If I find you are in the wrong, I shall take the liberty to tell you so plainly; but if you are being wronged, as I now begin to fear you are, you shall have all the aid and advice that the Wallingfords are able to give.”

“We have had grave fears that we should need all the advice and aid our friends could give us,” said Edith, hopefully, “but since the first outbreak we have had no cause for alarm and I now hope that the worst is over.”

“Therein lies your greatest danger, Edith,” replied Mrs.

Wallingford, earnestly. "While you are idle the enemy, as I now believe Mrs. Graham to be, is gathering together all its forces to hurl them upon you at some unexpected moment, with the hope of crushing you to the ground. I do not wish to alarm you, but I cannot refrain from impressing upon you the necessity for great vigilance in all you say and do, so that she may not be able to take advantage of your unguarded acts. I am afraid that many of your friends will be alienated from you by the combined efforts of herself and Bertha. I believe this is now being tried, and it is almost sure to be partly successful, at least."

"What you have said does alarm me," replied Edith, anxiously, "and yet if it proves to be true you can easily conceive my gratitude for your timely warning. I shall talk with Arthur about it and let you know what we will do."

"We shall watch developments with much anxiety, I assure you, and will take every opportunity to correct these false rumors. We can hardly exhibit our friendship in a better way than that. Now good-bye, Edith, and keep in the right path and you need fear no harm." And Mrs. Wallingford left Edith to her own thoughts.

Edith sat thinking over what Mrs. Wallingford had said, until the servant entered and handed her a letter; saying :

"A messenger from your mother's has just left this for you."

Edith quickly opened the letter and read :

"DEAR EDITH :

"I feel it to be my duty to make one more effort to save you from the shame and disgrace that you are bringing upon

yourself by the course you are now pursuing. It has always been my aim and I have always tried not only to do everything for you in order that you might not have cause for complaint, but also to hide and cover up your faults and keep your disposition hidden from the eyes of our friends. I have done this for your own and your father's sake. It does seem more than I can bear that now, so soon after the death of one of the best of fathers, you should make such a public exhibition of avarice and greed, thereby driving from you the friends who would otherwise stand by you.

“But this I might bear were it not that by your acts you bring dishonor upon the name of him who in his lifetime never did a dishonorable action or caused a friend to blush for shame. I did hope that you would be guided by the advice of your uncle Webster and wise counsel would prevail. I am so sorry for Arthur. He is a young man, just establishing a business reputation, and can ill afford to place himself in a position that makes him appear ridiculous in the eyes of business men.

“It is not I that you are fighting, it is the law. I had no more to do with this matter than any other person, and were it under my control I would give up everything, as I always have done, for peace. But this cannot be when law comes in with its authority, and I am told that I have already overstepped my legal rights in giving you so much in trying to make a reconciliation. But I am so anxious to save your father's name from dishonor and reproach that I now again beg of you to desist.

“But if you do not, remember that you are the one most to be injured. I am entirely at a loss to see what your object can be, and none of your former friends can understand your motives. If it is to get a little more money than rightfully belongs to you, you will find that money is little as compared to the shame and dishonor of such a

proceeding. Think of what your poor father would say of such actions, and consider what you are doing before it is too late. In great haste,

“Yours, as ever,

“MOTHER.”

Edith slowly folded the letter, and laying it upon the table, arose and paced the floor. Slowly back and forth she passed the cause of all her trouble, her agony of doubt and uncertainty keeping her in such a ferment that to sit quietly seemed a mockery. Now, for the first time since her contest with Mrs. Graham, she faltered.

“I can willingly stand all the rest,” said Edith, half aloud, “but father’s good name must never suffer at my hands. It must be that Arthur did not think of this when he advised this course,” and Edith continued her idle walking, her sensitive nature all on fire at the picture Mrs. Graham had drawn of her father’s disgrace. At last the tears came to her relief, and sinking into a chair she wept bitter tears of remorse and anguish.

It was thus that Arthur found her upon his return, and with much surprise inquired the cause of her grief.

“That letter,” replied Edith ; “read it, Arthur, and see what she says.”

Arthur hastily read the letter, and then tossing it upon the table, said with a laugh :

“And is that all you are crying over, Edith ?”

“But, Arthur, have we not been unwise in what we have done ?” inquired Edith, in surprise. “And will not father’s memory be dishonored by what we are doing ?”

“No, it will not !” replied Arthur, firmly. “The cause for his name being dishonored, if such should prove to be

the outcome, rests entirely upon her, and all that we can do toward carrying out his will can do his name no harm."

"But is there not some truth in what she says?" inquired Edith, anxiously.

"There is not a word of truth in the whole letter," replied Arthur, angrily, "and it shows more clearly than I dared expect that she is fearful we may succeed. The only thing that may prove true is her covert threat that you will be harmed more than she, but this can only be by her talking against you and misrepresenting facts."

"That reminds me," said Edith, somewhat comforted by Arthur's words, "that Mrs. Wallingford called on me this afternoon and told me that Mrs. Graham and Bertha were at work to influence our friends against us and warned me to be on my guard."

"I thought she was taking things too quietly for our safety," replied Arthur, anxiously; "but, thanks to the kindness of Mrs. Wallingford, we will now know what to expect."

"But do you think she will succeed?" inquired Edith, anxiously.

"Yes, to an extent that we cannot now conceive of; she has a decided advantage over you in this respect, Edith; for she can make them believe that black is white where you could not make them believe it black. If you desire to feel what she can do, keep your eyes open when next you attend church and you will see."

"But, Arthur, are you sure that we are in the right?" inquired Edith, despondingly.

"Yes, Edith, I am certain that we are; but what makes you doubt it?"



“Mrs. Wallingford suggested that Mr. Blood might be interested in misleading us, and asked me if you knew of your own knowledge that these things were true.”

“And a wise woman she is,” replied Arthur, admiringly. “Yes, I have seen the papers in the case and they leave no room for doubt.”

Unfortunately for Edith’s peace of mind, when next she attended church her eyes and mind were on the alert to notice any change that had taken place among those she numbered as her friends, and, as might have been expected, she found more than she desired. While many innocent acts were by her disordered imagination distorted into most grievous slights, others would have carried conviction to even less sensitive souls than hers. Of these, Mrs. Brandon was no exception. Her open stare as she looked Edith in the face and passed her by, only to most cordially greet Mrs. Graham, could not be misunderstood; while Mrs. Adell’s indifference to her presence was fully understood by Edith, who, sick and sore at heart, turned to where Arthur with much apparent interest was watching the effective manner with which Mrs. Graham was using her deeply bordered handkerchief, as she alternately smiled or sobbed, as best fitted each new arrival within the circle of her admiring friends.

“I have found out,” said Edith, with a shudder at the remembrance of her experience, “and I now feel as if I could never enter these doors again.”

“There is one thing, Edith, that you must now try and learn,” said Arthur, as they sadly walked along, “and the sooner you learn it the better for your peace of mind; follow Longfellow’s advice and let

Time lay his hand upon your heart, gently, not smiting it. But as a harper lays his open palm upon his harp, to deaden its vibrations.

“As it is now, you are like a frail flower, only too easily crushed under the foot of any one whose manner assumes superiority, while it should be that you could firmly face the world so long as you are certain that you are in the right.”

“You could do that, Arthur, but not I,” replied Edith, sadly.

“It would take away one of your greatest charms, Edith,” replied Arthur, kindly, “but it would save you many bitter tears; for I could not fail to notice when we were coming out of church that here and there you would wince and tremble at some imagined slight that to me seemed entirely unintentional.”

“Hush! Here comes Miss Ashton,” said Edith, under her breath, as she quickly stepped forward to meet her.

As Miss Ashton came toward her, she carefully lifted the folds of her dress, and stepping to one side, her eyes meanwhile riveted upon Edith’s, passed her without a word.

Edith’s breath came quick and fast as she felt the full force of the blow, and then for a moment her heart stood still while the receding blood left her face deathly pale.

“Well,” said Arthur, “there was no mistaking that!”

“No,” said Edith, greatly agitated, “but why, I cannot understand.”

“O, it is very plain to me,” replied Arthur, concealing his true feelings: “Some designing person has only to tell her a plausible story and, regardless of its truth or falsity, the friendship of a lifetime is thrown to the winds. See?”

"I don't believe you would care if I lost every friend I had, Arthur," said Edith, half provoked at his levity.

"Care!" replied Arthur, bitterly. "What's the use of caring? It is the way of the world, and whether you laugh or die of a broken heart, the world moves on in just the same old way. Look at it philosophically, Edith, and the poison of the sting is at once removed."

"I feel more like sinking in despair," said Edith, as she entered the house.

"If you are going to sink, choose something else than despair," said Arthur, with mock solemnity; "of all unsatisfactory things I know of, there are none more so than sinking in despair. Do as I do, Edith, sink into a comfortable seat and look pleasant," and Arthur, suiting his actions to his words, seated himself in a chair, and calmly surveyed the troubled face of his wife.

"I wish I had your disposition," said Edith; "nothing worries you, nothing causes you the least concern."

"There you make a grave mistake, Edith," replied Arthur, at once becoming serious; "but the effect my actions had upon you is the best proof that the appearance of stoical indifference is the best armor a person can wear against the envious darts of hate."

"And do you feel pained at what has occurred?" inquired Edith, in surprise.

"Yes," quickly replied Arthur, "I feel it keenly; did I not, I would be less than human. Do you think as I look back over all the time that this woman has persecuted you, and my eyes follow the dark and fearful trail that begins with her appearance in your home and ends only with the

wreck that we have witnessed to-day, that I do not feel pained at the sight, and desperate that I cannot stay its course? To doubt it, Edith, is to doubt my love for you; and yet I would not advise you to any other course than that we have decided on. To you this experience is like a winter's blast, it sears and drives you within yourself; with me, it the more firmly fixes my resolve to have justice meted out to you; and though all our friends should desert us, we still have each the other, and can safely trust time to set all things right."

"But would it not be better to give up trying to obtain justice, and let the matter drop; is not the loss of friends and the false position that we are placed in a greater penalty than we are willing to pay?" inquired Edith, anxiously.

"It has become a very serious matter," replied Arthur, thoughtfully, "and one that causes me great anxiety; for I must confess that I do not see my way clearly and cannot tell what the outcome will be. We are just beginning to realize the tremendous pressure that is to be brought to bear upon us to make us retract, and beside those who have been turned against us here, we will probably find that uncle Ralph's family and your aunt Hattie have already gone over to the enemy. You have not received a word of condolence or sympathy from them since father Graham's death, and under these circumstances their silence bodes us no good."

"O, she cannot influence them!" replied Edith, confidently.

"But if that proves true, it does not relieve the situation

of its seriousness," replied Arthur, earnestly. "We are destined to experience a bitter and relentless warfare, and this woman will hesitate at nothing that gives promise of aiding her to accomplish her purpose. Coarse in her nature, and less sensitive in her disposition than you, she can smile where you would despair. But above all this the right stands out clearly and distinctly on our side. Shall we go forward or shall we yield?"

"I cannot say what we should do, Arthur," replied Edith, doubtfully; "but whatever course you decide upon, I will stand by you though all our friends desert us."

"I have never doubted your constancy, Edith, and now if you are ready to make this sacrifice we will fight the old dragon until she cries for pity," said Arthur, resolutely.

"But if she should be the victor, how then?" inquired Edith, not so easily reassured.

"She will make us fight to the bitter end, and we must ask no favors," replied Arthur, his spirits quickly returning now that his course had been decided upon.

The following days were only the beginning of many sorrowful ones to Edith, who from this time on found more enjoyment in her home than she dared expect to find in any other place, and this the more readily reconciled her to exclude herself from the rude shocks that she now and then encountered when she met her former friends.

## CHAPTER XII.

### SHE IS A WOMAN—I CAN DO NOTHING.

It was not many days after the receipt of her letter that Edith was surprised to see Mrs. Graham alight at her door, and her heart stood still for a moment as she thought of the trial that was in store for her.

“I came, Edith,” began Mrs. Graham, “more from a sense of duty than pleasure, I can assure you ; and while I feel the disgrace you have brought upon us, it does not relieve me from my responsibility concerning you. You received my letter, I suppose ?”

“I did,” replied Edith, almost inaudibly.

“Ah, well, my mind is relieved,” said Mrs. Graham, resignedly. “I received no reply and so could not know that it had reached you.”

“I did not think it required an answer,” said Edith, quietly.

“It did not, particularly ; and now that I know you received it, I feel that my duty has been done even though you still persist in your course. I have done all that I could to save you, Edith, and you must now take the consequences of your acts.”

"I have no desire to do what is not right," replied Edith, meekly.

"Then why do you persist in doing as you do?" said Mrs. Graham, turning sharply upon her. "Your own interests ought to be reason enough to make you change your course, even if you care nothing for friends, reputation, or your father's good name. This all-absorbing love of money is something I cannot understand. It is too low and too base in its nature to have even one redeeming feature."

Edith could make no reply, only the silent tears gave evidence that she felt what Mrs. Graham said.

"I saw your aunt Hattie a few days ago," continued Mrs. Graham, unmoved by Edith's tears, "and I found that she had already heard of your actions and knew of all your evil doings. When she first heard of it she decided to come and see you and urge you to change your course, but when she realized the shame and disgrace that you had brought upon the memory of your father she changed her mind, and now says she never wishes to see you again."

"But why should she say that?" gasped Edith, nearly overcome by the shock.

"Why!" repeated Mrs. Graham, with a scornful smile. "Unless you are deceiving yourself you know only too well why!"

"I cannot understand it," said Edith, mournfully.

"That is because you are so blinded by greed and avarice that you will not see," replied Mrs. Graham, disdainfully. "Your whole desire seems to be to obtain your father's money, regardless of the disgrace your actions bring upon us all."



“Why, Mrs. Graham!” said Edith, appealingly, “I do not feel that way at all! I confess that I would like some little keepsake, some memento from my mother’s home, but that is all.”

“I knew that was it,” replied Mrs. Graham, with exasperating calmness; “you are all absorbed with your desires to get hold of this property.”

“But the trifles I ask for would be worthless to any one else,” said Edith, astonished at her own boldness. “O, Mrs. Graham! will you not let me have something that belonged to my mother, I care not what it is, only that her hands should have touched it?”

For a moment Mrs. Graham regarded Edith with a smile of pitiless scorn, then, with biting sarcasm, she asked:

“And is it the favors I have received at your hands that induces you to ask these favors of me? You are aware, I suppose, that I must pay for every item of this personal property, whether I give it away or sell it.”

“But I would pay you for it!” replied Edith, desperately. “Yes, I would pay many times its value if you would only let me have something by which to remember my dead mother and her home!”

“I have no need of your money, Edith,” replied Mrs. Graham, complacently.

“But may I not have some memento from my former home?—something—anything!” cried Edith, despairingly. “O, Mrs. Graham! you cannot deny me that; you cannot want them all!”

“No,” said Mrs. Graham, slowly, “I do not want them; but so long as you oppose my desires you can expect nothing

—absolutely nothing ! I would burn them and throw the ashes to the winds rather than see you enjoy them under these circumstances !”

Edith’s gentle nature could not fathom the depth of Mrs. Graham’s relentless hatred. She felt that by this woman she was hated, always had been, and always would be ; but she also knew that money was Mrs. Graham’s god, and why she should refuse her offer of many times the value for the trifles she desired was to her a puzzling mystery which she silently tried to solve, until Mrs. Graham asked, inquiringly :

“ Have any of your friends called lately, Edith ?”

“ Only Mrs. Wallingford,” was the reluctant reply.

“ O,” said Mrs. Graham, significantly, “ is she the only one ?”

“ Yes,” replied Edith, sorrowfully, “ she is the only one.”

“ Have you heard from the relatives lately ?” continued Mrs. Graham, with malicious indifference to the pain she saw she was causing Edith.

“ I have not heard from them since father died,” said Edith, bursting into tears.

“ You do not wonder at it under the circumstances, do you ?”

“ I cannot help wondering at it,” said Edith, piteously, “ for it seems very strange, and Arthur thinks some one must have misrepresented things to them, for they have no cause to feel offended at anything we have done.”

“ Poor child !” said Mrs. Graham, consolingly, “ how little you realize the extent of your misdeeds ! You have

always had me to cover up your faults and hide your evil doings, and now you are surprised when you find that I can do so no longer. Have you seen Miss Ashton lately ?”

“No,” replied Edith, despairingly, “something has turned even her against me, and she does not speak to me now.”

“You have not given up attending your church, have you, Edith ?” inquired Mrs. Graham, with well-feigned solicitude.

“Yes, we cannot bear to attend there any longer, and Arthur has decided that we will stay away.”

“I am shocked to hear you say so !” said Mrs. Graham, impressively. “You should remember that if you keep away from the source of good you are certain to become worse instead of better. There is a promise, Edith, that ‘though your sins be like scarlet they shall be made white as wool ;’ and though your friends may censure your actions and feel that you have done wrong, it only makes matters worse to lead a life like this, without a God or a hope in the hereafter. I have always found peace and comfort in these things, and in this terrible affliction”—and Mrs. Graham hesitated a moment while she wiped the tears away—“I find my greatest strength and fortitude by keeping near to Him.”

“But we do attend church,” said Edith, in desperation at the thought of this last hope of comfort being taken from her ; “we go elsewhere.”

“Have you become members of any other church ?” inquired Mrs. Graham, calmly.

“No, we have not, as yet.”

“Then you are as far from grace as if you did not attend at all,” said Mrs. Graham, decisively.

“I feel it,” said Edith, “and have spoken to Arthur about it ; but he says no, that if we do, the same evil influence will enter there that we have experienced in our own.”

“O,” said Mrs. Graham, smiling in spite of herself, “so he has arrived at that exalted condition where even our churches are not good enough for him ! Well, Edith, when you and Arthur become more meek in spirit I shall have some hope of seeing your course pointing more nearly to the straight and narrow way ; until then, I can only hope and pray.”

And thus Edith met the baleful influence of this woman at every turn. She saw her friends droop and die, while even the sanctity of her home was ruthlessly invaded in order that one more poisoned dart might be hurled into the quivering flesh by this pitiless hand.

When Arthur entered the house and saw Edith’s tear-stained checks and deathly paleness, he quickly surmised that she had again been afflicted by Mrs. Graham’s presence.

“Has Mrs. Graham been here again ?” anxiously inquired Arthur.

“Yes,” replied Edith ; “but how did you know it ?”

“I thought so by your appearance,” said Arthur, upon whose face Edith saw slowly creeping a look that she had never seen there before. The sight alarmed her, and she quickly asked :

“Why, Arthur, what is the matter ?”

“O, I was just thinking how fortunate it was for her that she was a woman,” said Arthur, evasively. “She never enters this house without leaving you nearly frenzied with fear and desperation, and you do not get over it for days afterward.”

“I know it,” replied Edith, as with an effort she kept back her tears, “but I cannot help it. She always makes me feel that I am entirely in the wrong, and I don’t dare to argue with her, while her cutting sarcasm and aggravating manner leave me utterly powerless.”

“Well, Edith,” said Arthur, hesitatingly, “I have never laid a command upon you before, and I dislike to do so now, but you should remember that your home is your castle, and no intruder has a right to enter here unless by your consent; and if Mrs. Graham cannot come here and act like a lady, you must make her understand that she cannot come at all.”

“But I could not do that!” replied Edith, appalled at the thought. “I have been under her influence so long that I would not dare to object to anything that she does.”

“You must!” said Arthur, decisively. “This refinement of cruelty is more than I am willing to see you endure, and if I were present she would not dare to insult and browbeat you in this manner, for she knows that it would not do,”

“You may think so, Arthur,” replied Edith, sadly, “but no one has ever dared to oppose Mrs. Graham—it would not do; when you tried, you would find that you could not.”

“Well, said Arthur, determinedly, “if she ever does so in my presence you will see.”

“And what would you do ?” inquired Edith, wonderingly.

“Do !” said Arthur, vehemently, “I would— She is a woman—I could do nothing ! The law protects her in robbing you, and I am powerless to prevent it ; her coarser nature makes it safe for her to enter your home and make your life a burden, and I cannot protect you. We are entirely at her mercy, unless you can throw off these slavish chains and defy her.”

“But I could not do that !” said Edith, trembling at the thought. “I do not want her to come, and yet I would not dare to try to prevent it.”

“But you can at least give her to understand that this is your city of refuge,” said Arthur, imploringly, “and that without your consent she cannot enter. This you must do, Edith—it is your only safety ; for I have seen enough to-day to convince me that she is straining every nerve to make our lives as miserable as possible in order that she may force us to abandon our opposition. This morning I had hardly entered my office before I was favored with a call from Mr. Lewiston, who, as you know, was a firm friend of ours as well as father Graham. He urged me to take good counsel in this matter, and thereby if possible avoid the disruption of family ties that always follows law suits. At first I thought he came only as a friend of Mrs. Graham’s and as a spy upon us ; but after I had talked with him for some time, I became convinced that he came as an honest but deluded friend, who was anxious to see the matter in its true light and act accordingly, so I frankly told him what we were doing and argued the case for some

time ; but I feel certain that he left me as fully impressed that we were in the wrong as he was before he came, and yet I believe as firmly as ever that we are right and that he has been wrongly informed and does not understand the matter as it is. But if this woman can thus convince those who are our friends, and really desirous of being just, what can we expect from those who are not so favorably inclined ? If even our best friends believe us to be wrong, we might as well be, as far as their opinion is concerned."

"But why did you not tell him that Mrs. Graham was the one who was trying take more than father gave her ?" inquired Edith, anxiously.

"I did," said Arthur, bitterly, "and he met it with the same old answer, that it was impossible, for even if she desired to she could not, for the reason that the law would prevent her from doing so ; and I know that he left me with the belief that we were in the wrong and she in the right. But to fill the cup to overflowing, I got a letter from father, in which he enclosed one that he had received from Mrs. Graham, in which she says :

"MR. HOWARD :

"*Dear Sir*—I was surprised and disappointed to find that you had been in the city and did not come to see me. I can only account for it by the supposition that you have been prejudiced against me by those who are too near and dear to us both for me to say a word against, even in self-defense. Allow me to remind you, however, that no just judge pronounces a verdict without first hearing both sides. I am certainly trying to do right, and to work unselfishly for the best interests of all. I am acting in perfect accord with brother Webster, a man who is incapable of



doing intentional wrong, and also under advice of both good legal counsel and wise and discreet Christian friends. May I not have the friendship of yourself and family, for it seems as if all this trouble would kill me? May the Lord guide and help!

“Yours, as ever,

“SARAH J. GRAHAM.”

“And has it come to this?” said Edith, as Arthur finished reading.

“Yes, it has come to the point where, not satisfied with alienating our friends and acquaintances, she attempts to prejudice even my own father and mother against us.”

“But she did not succeed, did she? What did your father write in return?” said Edith in one breath.

“He answered that he did not care to enter into a discussion of the case, and had gone no farther in his investigations than to see the clause in the will where Mr. Graham bequeathed her an equal one-third, and her signature to the document in which she demanded that a large amount in excess of that be set off to her as a widow’s award. That if he had judged her at all, it was not upon rumor or hearsay evidence, but upon the evidence of this paper, duly signed and sworn to by herself.”

“Good! good! isn’t he just splendid?” shouted Edith, nearly beside herself with joy.

“Well,” replied Arthur complacently, “I would not think much of my father and mother if they had not done so.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ROUTED AND DISMAYED.

"Drive to Mrs. Wallingford's," was Mrs. Graham's order as she left Edith and entered her carriage.

I have delayed too long in calling there, thought Mrs. Graham, and must now make up for my delay. If she remains a friend to Edith when I leave her, I shall be surprised.

"I have just called on Edith," began Mrs. Graham, as Mrs. Wallingford entered her parlor, "and on my return I thought I could drop in and see you without your considering me as being indelicate in so doing."

"Apologies are entirely unnecessary," replied Mrs. Wallingford, courteously; "I should not have considered it indelicate even without your apology. But how did you find Edith?"

"She is in excellent health, thank you," replied Mrs. Graham, graciously, "and seems to enjoy herself as heartily as at any time in her life."

"That takes a load of guilt from off my conscience," replied Mrs. Wallingford, smiling. "I have intended every day to make her a visit, but procrastination has been the thief that has taken all my time, until I now find that it

has been several days since I last saw her, and my conscience began to be unruly."

"You have many friends whom you do not see as often as that, I dare say," replied Mrs. Graham, smiling.

"Yes, too many, I am afraid," said Mrs. Wallingford, consciously; "but Edith's case is different. I left her burdened with care and greatly worried, and as an old friend I felt that it was my duty to cheer and advise her to the full extent of my ability."

"That is a rare species of friendship, Mrs. Wallingford," replied Mrs. Graham, quietly, "and one that is well worth one's best efforts to possess. I judge you must be a firm friend of Edith's."

"Yes, or any other young woman who is placed in her unfortunate condition," replied Mrs. Wallingford, earnestly.

"It is strange," replied Mrs. Graham, musingly, "that I have not seen some indication that she so keenly felt her father's death."

"She is human, Mrs. Graham, and must feel his death, even though she makes no outward sign," replied Mrs. Wallingford, half reproachfully.

"I supposed her thoughts were only of his money and her worry that she might not get more than was justly hers," said Mrs. Graham, with a sigh.

"In that respect, Mrs. Graham, you have misjudged her," replied Mrs. Wallingford, confidently, "for that is not her disposition."

"You do not know her as I do," replied Mrs. Graham, with a knowing smile. "When you know more of her you will be better able to judge."

"I know more than I wish to, now," replied Mrs. Wallingford, sadly.

"In what way?" demanded Mrs. Graham, turning sharply upon her.

"To answer that would place me in a very disagreeable position," said Mrs. Wallingford, quietly. "I have no desire to deceive you, and yet if I told you all, I would too forcibly bring to your mind George Canning's words relating to the candid friend.\* No, Mrs. Graham, it were better that we allowed the matter to die a natural death."

Mrs. Graham was in doubt, and found that she had been foiled by the very frankness that permitted no dispute. If she would only give me an opportunity to present my side of the case, she thought, I would willingly trust to its effect upon her.

"Your words, Mrs. Wallingford, are like riddles," began Mrs. Graham; "I can neither affirm nor deny. If you were to speak plainly, you might do me a kindness and at the same time explain any misunderstanding that may have occurred."

"If I thought I could reconcile you and Edith I would willingly take the risk of being misunderstood," replied Mrs. Wallingford, thrown off her guard for the moment by Mrs. Graham's apparent frankness.

"With myself you will have no trouble," replied Mrs. Graham, earnestly; for I would be only too well pleased to have everything made pleasant again, and pledge you my best endeavors to accomplish that purpose."

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\* "But of all the plagues, good heaven, thy wrath can send,  
Save, save, oh, save me from the candid friend!"

"I first heard of this trouble at the sewing society," began Mrs. Wallingford, "and was much surprised to find that you had been the first one to mention it."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Graham, with a wondering look, "that accounts for its being so rapidly circulated. And who first told you of it?"

"Mrs. Brandon, I believe."

"I am surprised at my own foolishness," said Mrs. Graham, deprecatingly. "I knew her to be a most mendacious gossip, and yet I was foolish enough to tell her. The history of it was simply this: I felt so lonesome in my great, desolate house, that I determined to seek a change of surroundings, and take my mind from off my sorrow. I attended the meeting of the sewing society for this sole purpose. Naturally our conversation turned upon Mr. Graham's death and the settling of the estate. Some of the friends had heard that there was trouble, and had imagined most outlandish things as having already occurred. I saw that if I remained silent it would be understood as confirming these rumors, and when Mrs. Brandon asked me point blank if Edith was trying to break her father's will, I concluded it was best for me to admit it, and ask her, as a friend, to keep from talking of it to others. This I did, and unwillingly, but as the best thing to do under the circumstances."

"I remember, now, that Mrs. Adell said that you admitted it unwillingly," said Mrs. Wallingford, "but it was very unwise to do so at all."

"I see that it was, now," hastily replied Mrs. Graham; "but it was an error of the head more than the heart."

“Another thing that surprised me was that the same afternoon Miss Locke called upon my daughter, and told her much the same story that you admitted to Mrs. Brandon. Under these circumstances, Mrs. Graham, you will excuse me for thinking that you intentionally circulated these stories to injure Edith in the eyes of her friends.”

“I do not wonder that you should have thought so, Mrs. Wallingford, but Bertha’s action was entirely unwarranted, and I can only account for it by remembering that Edith’s attempt to break her father’s will so greatly shocked us all that for some time it was the chief topic of conversation in our household.”

“I do not think we need discuss that point, Mrs. Graham,” replied Mrs. Wallingford, significantly; “I think we both understand it fully.”

Mrs. Graham shot a quick, inquiring glance at Mrs. Wallingford, whose calm, untroubled face gave no indication of a hidden meaning, and with renewed confidence she said:

“I am so mortified that this should have taken place that I sometimes wish I were dead. I, no doubt, have made some mistakes, but I have always tried to be just in all my dealings; and I was informed only a few days ago that a strict reading of the will would give me all of the valuable land that surrounds the homestead, but I declined to take it, and do now, and I have told Arthur so, for I know that Mr. Graham intended that the property he gave me should only include the portion upon which the house stands; and I will be well pleased to get that, for if Edith succeeds in breaking the will I can expect nothing—”

“Mrs. Graham,” interrupted Mrs. Wallingford, “I gave you warning that I understood this matter concerning the breaking of the will, and it seems that you did not understand it as I intended that you should. Now, in order that we may fully understand each other, I will tell you that Edith positively denies any act or intent to break her father’s will.”

“O, she has done that from the first,” replied Mrs. Graham, scornfully.

“Her denial, Mrs. Graham, was so positive as to impress me with its truth,” replied Mrs. Wallingford, earnestly ; “but in order that I might not be mislead by it, I had Mr. Wallingford thoroughly investigate the matter, and he found that the records of the court confirmed her statements and branded yours as false. Now, Mrs. Graham, it may be that I do you an injustice, but I believe that you know them to be so, and have intentionally circulated these reports against Edith in order that you might alienate her friends from her by their confidence in your integrity, while Edith proves her worthiness by showing her ability to do without them. Now, Mrs. Graham, as a professor of the Christian faith, it is your duty to do all in your power to right this great wrong ; and if you prove your worth by so doing, Jane Wallingford will be your friend ; if not, I must ask you to never enter my house again.”

So suddenly had this avenging avalanche fallen upon her while she imagined that her work was nearly done, that, all unprepared, Mrs. Graham found herself defenceless and in abject terror ; the room grew dark about her ; and when Mrs. Wallingford ceased, “transfixed they sat with neither



speaking to the other, but like dumb statues stared each on other and looked deathly pale." Her equal in wealth and station, and wielding an influence that made her envious, Mrs. Graham easily realized that with Mrs. Wallingford she had utterly failed, while the power that she trusted would aid her would now be used for Edith's vindication. Quickly recovering her composure, Mrs. Graham arose, and with a stately inclination of her head, was about to retire, when Mrs. Wallingford extended her hand, and, all unmindful of herself, said :

" If I have spoken harshly, I pray you forgive me ; my very earnestness should prove my friendship. Will this parting be only for a time ?"

Mrs. Graham's cold gray eyes shot out a flash of deadly hatred as her only reply.

" Home," said Mrs. Graham, hoarsely, as she entered her carriage and gave way to her bitter thoughts.

Mrs. Wallingford, with much apparent exhaustion, sought a place where, uninterrupted, she could review Edith's case, and see where she could be of service.

We are, thought Mrs. Wallingford, too often the messengers of these designing persons. How often we believe the first story that is told, and, not waiting or seeking to know its truth, are by its very falsity aroused to hatred of the innocent ! It is not a pleasing retrospect to view the many times we fail to prove the slander ere we believe it true.

It was not long afterward that Edith was favored with a visit from Mrs. Wallingford, who said :

" I have long neglected you, Edith, and might have done

so for a longer time were it not for a visit I received from Mrs. Graham. But in the meantime I have improved several opportunities for bringing about a more correct understanding of the true condition of your affairs."

"And I have also been favored with a call from Mrs. Graham," said Edith, "and I am at a loss to know just what she means; for when I talk to Arthur or you I feel that she has done wrong, but she always makes me believe that I have disgraced the memory of my father and been very dishonorable in many ways, while there is not a doubt that she is not just and right in all she does."

"Had it not been for the earnestness with which you denied Mrs. Graham's charges against you, Edith, I would have found it easy to have believed her; but your statements were so positive and earnest that Mr. Wallingford decided to investigate for himself, and found it no difficult matter to substantiate all you said, which left no course for us but to endorse your actions and wish you success."

"You cannot imagine how much good it does me to hear you say so," replied Edith, her heart filled with gratitude.

"It was for the purpose of strengthening and encouraging you that I came; and I must congratulate you, Edith, that Arthur stands so firmly for your defence, for it is not often in a case like this that a husband will fight for justice for his wife, or, if he begins the fight, quickly abandons it on the first intimation that his actions are possibly indelicate."

"Arthur promised to cherish and protect me," smilingly replied Edith, "and now is only fulfilling his promise. He will be here before long, and you must wait and see him."

“I think I will, as I have some questions that I wish to ask him. But does not Mrs. Graham’s course perplex and worry him, Edith?”

“It worries both of us,” replied Edith, quickly; “but while I tremble and fear, he only grows firmer and more self-reliant. At first I feared that he would break down and allow her to have her way; he was very downhearted and fearful that all our friends would leave us, and that I would not be willing to pay the penalty that Mrs. Graham seemed to have determined to force upon us; but when he found that I consented, he became more determined than ever before, and now when he meets her he is so cool and collected that I just admire his bravery, and often wonder what I would have done if it had not been for him.”

“Yours was a love match, Edith, and no doubt,” replied Mrs. Wallingford, with an amused smile at Edith’s enthusiasm in regard to Arthur; “but your feelings do credit to your womanly heart.”

“Since I saw you last I have seen all your predictions come true in regard to our old friends deserting us,” said Edith, saddened at the recollection.

“Not your true friends, Edith,” replied Mrs. Wallingford, earnestly, “they were only apparent friends. Those who were truly your friends are your friends yet and will remain so as long as you need them, and they are much more numerous than you imagine. The great number who have deserted you makes you feel as if all had gone; because those who remain are so few as compared to the whole number; but those who prove themselves friends now are worth more than a countless host of untried friends.”

“I feel that to be true,” replied Edith, thoughtfully ; “but some that have turned against me I find it hard to give up. Miss Ashton and I have been friends since we were children, and now she seems only too anxious to show her dislike for me.”

“Can it be that Miss Ashton has been turned against you ?” inquired Mrs. Wallingford, earnestly.

“Yes, she is displeased at something, and I have no knowledge of ever having said or done anything by which she could be offended, and yet she is.”

“It must be the same influence that has affected the others,” said Mrs. Wallingford, with a troubled sigh ; “but I am surprised at her willingness to believe that one side of the story contains all the truth, when she was such a firm friend of yours. I would advise you to see her, Edith, and ask for an explanation.”

“I have thought of doing so,” replied Edith, thoughtfully, “but it has always seemed to me that if any one was to speak ill of a friend to me that I should not believe them, and that it would be my duty to inform them of their danger.”

“That is the wisest course, Edith, but it is not the way of the world. Strange as it may seem, it is, nevertheless, true that we are all more or less liable to be misled by false reports, and often do not seek to know their truth before making our decision. Friend parts from friend, father from son, and wife from husband, for no better reason than that some one has told them a plausible falsehood concerning friend, son, or husband ; and in all the world I know of only one affectionate tie that slander cannot break

—no fountain of deep, strong, deathless love save that within a mother's heart. Against this, dark calumny beats in vain. Vice, dissipation and death may enter, but that love never wavers or dies. All else is at the mercy of designing knaves, to whom the best of friends will yield."

"I know only too well that what you say is true," said Edith, sadly, "but I find it hard to believe, even though I have proved it. The sanctity of my home is not proof against it, and in this case even the church is used as a weapon against me, so much so that we no longer attend there and have found our way into other places."

"I was afraid that such might be the result," said Mrs. Wallingford, anxiously, "but I cannot wonder that you find it disagreeable to attend there under these circumstances, which only proves that evil influences have greater power than good."

"I find it so," replied Edith, as she arose to meet Arthur as he entered.

"Holding a council of war?" inquired Arthur, with a pleasant smile. "Your faces look solemn enough to warrant the suspicion that you have been talking of the widow."

"We plead guilty," replied Mrs. Wallingford, pleasantly.

"And how do you do?" said Arthur, extending his hand. "We feel honored in your presence, under the circumstances."

"When I see the quiet, uncomplaining demeanor of yourself and wife under such trying circumstances as these, I feel that I am honored more than you," replied Mrs. Wallingford, graciously.

"You see us in our own most amiable mood, Mrs. Wallingford," replied Arthur, laughing; "but I am afraid that if you knew of all our bitter complainings against Mrs. Graham's actions you would think that we were anything but amiable."

"If in your cooler moments you can remember your repinings without remorse, I think you can trust to their being right," replied Mrs. Wallingford quietly.

"There is where I am afraid my conscience does not do its duty," replied Arthur, laughing, "for I can never think of Mrs. Graham's actions toward Edith, and that she is the real robber, without becoming almost furious."

"That reminds me," said Mrs. Wallingford, "that Mrs. Graham said she had no desire to take more than she was entitled to, and that while a strict reading of the will would give her all the land surrounding the homestead, she had told you that she would not accept of it, as she knew it was not her husband's intention to give her more than the portion upon which the house stands. Can you explain this? For I must admit that it has shaken my confidence in the correctness of my judgment of her."

"When she told me that pretty little story," said Arthur, smiling at the recollection, "I laughed at her, and in reply assured her that we were perfectly willing that she should take all of it, for the will provided that if she did take it and it should exceed more than her share she must pay the difference in cash."

"O, I see," said Mrs. Wallingford, laughing. "So your offer to her was not so generous, after all."

"Not more so than hers to give up something which if

she kept she would have to pay for," said Arthur, laughingly. "But for all that, I dare say she is using this plausible story with telling effect whenever she has the opportunity."

"I am afraid she is, Arthur. But the strangest part of the whole matter is that the law allows her to take the widow's award in excess of what the will gives her; and yet Mr. Wallingford says it does, and that though the law permits it, it is a great injustice."

"I know it is unjust, and it seems to be law," replied Arthur, with clouded brow, "but I am not yet prepared to give it up. I am earnestly seeking for some way out of the difficulty, but there seems to be but little hope, for every one I speak to about it laughs at my endeavors and assures me that they will all be in vain."

"I hope you will find it, Arthur, but Mr. Wallingford assures me you have no hope of so doing."

"It looks that way now, Mrs. Wallingford, but necessity is the mother of invention, and I shall keep at it until I succeed or utterly fail."

"There will be none who will rejoice more at your success than the Wallingford's," said that lady, rising. "And now, Edith, I shall not be so long in coming again, and in the meantime remember us as true friends, ready to advise or help."



## CHAPTER XIV.

### MY HUSBAND WAS A MISER.

"I sent for you," began Mr. Blood, as Arthur entered his office, "to tell you that the appraisers will make their report in a few days and that I have reason to believe that they intend to give the widow a very large amount as her award. I can see that this is what has been determined upon by Mr. Skinner, and I want to know what you intend to do."

"What can we do?" inquired Arthur, doubtfully.

"We might try to have the award reduced," replied Mr. Blood, evidently doubtful of success, "but I fear we would have little hope of doing so, as the court is almost certain to approve the report of the appraisers."

"And does the court do this regardless of the amount?" inquired Arthur, with much surprise.

"Yes, almost always," replied Mr. Blood. "You see, the court has no way of knowing the private affairs of Mr. Graham, and must depend entirely on the judgment of the appraisers, and it takes the strongest kind of proof to make the court set their report aside."

"What kind of proof would you regard as strong?" inquired Arthur, in perplexity.

"The strongest proof would be Mr. Graham's statement of how much it cost him each year to pay his household expenses ; but as he is not alive, of course this would be impossible."

"But his books would do equally well, would they not?" inquired Arthur eagerly.

"Yes—if they will show all that he received and spent," replied Mr. Blood, cautiously.

"They were very carefully kept," replied Arthur, earnestly, "and I could tell at a glance what he received and what he spent during any of the recent months of his life."

"If you can do that," replied Mr. Blood, excitedly, "we can defeat them as sure as can be."

"Well, I can," replied Arthur, confidently.

"Then I shall serve them with notice to produce the books," said Mr. Blood, determinedly.

Thus Mr. Blood was carefully laying his plans to defeat the wily scheming of this unscrupulous woman and her cunning lawyer ; but he found that a wily lawyer and a widow's tears were no small obstacles in his way. And Arthur, even with the aid of Mr. Blood, was by no means sure of success, as at the appointed time he and Edith entered the court room and seated themselves by their attorney's side.

Opposite them sat Mr. Skinner, busily engaged in arranging his papers, while near him, and surrounded by a circle of admiring friends, sat Mrs. Graham and uncle Webster.

"Your Honor," said Mr. Blood, rising from his seat, "we would be pleased to have your decision on the right of the widow to take this award. It is simply a question of

law and requires no argument ; but I desire to call your attention to the fact that this will contains a clause by which the testator hoped and intended to protect his estate from just such claims as this."

"The law is very plain on that point," replied Judge Winters, "and no will can prevent a widow from taking her award if she desires it, though wills are often drawn with that intent, and this seems to be one of that class ; but it has no binding force upon the widow unless she desires to abide by it ; that she does not, is evidenced by her signature to this claim for her award."

"First 'blood' for our side," whispered Mr. Skinner to his confrere, while Mrs. Graham complacently smoothed the folds of her cloak and with a knowing smile turned to Webster and whispered : "Even the Judge seems to be against them."

Webster was evidently greatly pleased at the decision of the court, as well as flattered by Mrs. Graham's attentions, and chuckled with ill-concealed enjoyment.

"If that is your decision we must submit," said Mr. Blood, as he seated himself and awaited further developments.

"Are the appraisers ready with their report ?" inquired Judge Winters.

"They are, your Honor," said Mr. Skinner, handing him the paper.

"Let the attorney for the daughter see it."

Mr. Skinner tossed the paper to Mr. Blood and took his seat.

Mr. Blood waited but a moment ; its contents were no

surprise to him, and after a hasty glance at the report he was ready for the contest.

“My understanding is,” said Mr. Blood, as he slowly arose, “that this award is for one year’s support of the widow. Am I correct in that understanding?”

“Yes, for one year,” replied Judge Winters; “to support the widow one year in the same condition as at the time of her husband’s death.”

“Then, your Honor, we object to the amount of this award,” said Mr. Blood, decisively. “It is excessive and therefore very unjust to the others interested in the estate, and, as you can see by these books of account kept by Mr. Graham, it would have been impossible for him to have spent as much for the whole family as the widow now demands for her support alone. Here are the books, and their footings show for themselves. Farther than this, I desire to call your attention to estates far more valuable than this, in which the amount of the widow’s award has never exceeded one-half of this claim, and I challenge the other side to produce a case where the amount has ever been so large; and if you will take the expenses for insurance, taxes, etc., from the amount of Mr. Graham’s income as shown by these books, you can more readily understand the injustice of allowing this claim.”

“Let me see the books,” said Judge Winters.

“I have but little to say,” began Mr. Skinner, confidently, “but I desire to call the attention of the court to the fact that the amount of this award has been decided upon by men well known in the business community, and men above reproach or suspicion of wrong doing. They

are better acquainted with the habits and life of the widow's former husband than we can possibly be, therefore I maintain that the amount of this award is not excessive, but perfectly just and fair, and their report should be accepted and confirmed by the court."

"How do you reconcile your theories with these books of account?" inquired Judge Winters.

"O, they may have been fixed," sneeringly replied Mr. Skinner.

"The gentleman forgets that until he brought them into court he had full possession of them," quietly interposed Mr. Blood.

"The best way to decide the matter will be to place the widow on the stand," said Judge Winters. "Let her be sworn."

This was an unexpected turn of affairs, and not entirely acceptable to the now thoroughly aroused Mrs. Graham.

"How many persons are there in your family?" began Judge Winters.

"Five," replied Mrs. Graham, curtly.

"Who are they?"

"Two house servants, one coachman, Miss Locke and myself."

"All dependent upon you for their support?"

"They are."

"How many horses does the coachman have in his charge?"

"Two."

"How much did it cost Mr. Graham the last year for his household expenses?"

Mrs. Graham was about to answer, when, like a flash, the full force and bearing of the question became evident. It was a trying time ; for if she said too much, she could not meet the evidence of the books ; if she said less, her award would be reduced. She looked at Webster and her attorney with mute appeals for aid, but finding that they were powerless to aid her, she determined, as a last resort, to parry the blow as best she could, and answered :

“ I cannot say, exactly.”

“ Then tell us as nearly as you can,” said Judge Winters, quietly.

“ I cannot say without thinking over it some considerable time,” replied Mrs. Graham, at a loss for an answer.

“ We will wait,” dryly remarked Judge Winters, as he leaned back in his chair.

Mrs. Graham moved uneasily from side to side, her hands nervously opening and closing upon vacancy, while her mind was actively engaged in trying to solve the difficult problem. At last, as if by a desperate effort, she answered :

“ I suppose about ten thousand dollars.”

“ How, then, do you account for the footings of these books ?” inquired Judge Winters.

“ I had a separate income of my own,” replied Mrs. Graham, haughtily, “ which I contributed to the general fund.”

It was now Arthur's turn to be surprised, and when he remembered that she was only a poor girl when Mr. Graham married her, the conviction came over him that in her desperation she had committed willful perjury in order to escape from sure defeat. Turning to Edith with an inquiring

look, he only saw his own blank amazement reflected in her face, and that she was likewise at a loss to understand Mrs. Graham's claim of separate income.

It was evident that Judge Winters was now satisfied that the discrepancy could thus be accounted for and the amount of the award must stand, when Arthur leaned forward and whispered in Mr. Blood's ear:

"Ask her where she obtained it."

"Your Honor," said Mr. Blood, "will you ask the witness where and how she obtained this income? She has aroused our curiosity."

"You may tell us, if you please, where and how you obtained this income," said Judge Winters, addressing Mrs. Graham.

"I object! I object!" shouted Mr. Skinner, who greatly feared the result.

"The question is a proper one, and she must answer it," replied Judge Winters, decisively.

"It was money that I obtained from Miss Locke for board," replied Mrs. Graham, sullenly.

"O!" significantly remarked the now irate judge. "And who furnished the money to supply the table?"

"Mr. Graham."

"No separate income," sententiously remarked Judge Winters, "and the award will be reduced one-half."

"The 'blood' is not of as good quality this time—eh, Mr. Skinner?"

Mr. Skinner's only reply was a threatening look at the cause of his defeat.

"There is one other matter we desire to have settled,"



continued Mr. Blood, "and that is the appraisalment of the personal property. You have seen the desperate attempts of this woman to sustain the appraisalment of her award, and in all probability will see a similar attempt on her part to have this appraisalment of the personal property sustained. After studying the case thoroughly, in order that I might arrive at a just conclusion, I now feel justified in branding this appraisalment as another attempt to rob this estate. You have this woman's sworn statement that it cost her husband ten thousand dollars a year for living expenses ; that three servants were necessary for the carrying on of the style and splendor of her home ; and yet, if we are to believe the report of the appraisers, this family, living in all this grandeur, in the most fashionable part of this city, in one of the finest houses in the neighborhood, and spending ten thousand dollars a year for provisions, slept upon beds of straw, walked upon carpets worth only thirty-five cents a yard, ran the risk of being late to meals by depending upon five dollar watches, wore diamond shirt studs worth but one dollar and a half for a set of three, while all that this elegant mansion contained, they say, is worth less than five hundred dollars ; and if in your imagination you will follow me as I enter the stables, you will be astonished to find their coachman presiding over horses valued at only fifty dollars, upon which he places only five dollars worth of harness, and then hitches them to a seventy-five dollar coupe or a five dollar sleigh, as best suits the season. Thus we are led to believe that this family, after spending ten thousand dollars in eating and drinking, lived in abject squalor and risked their lives

in conveyances that were so old and poor as to be unsafe. But as strange as all this may seem, it must be true, for these appraisers say so ; and we have the word of the eminent counsel representing the other side that they are wise and just men. This I deny. They cannot be wise when they decide that this property, which we all know is worth thousands of dollars, is worth less than five hundred ; they cannot be just men when they set this low valuation upon this property, well knowing that the widow will take all of it, and at these ruinous prices, and thereby defraud the others of their share. There is but one way in which we can account for their actions, and that is, that they have not been proof against the winsome smiles and captivating glances of this designing woman. The picture I have drawn might well be the cause of levity were it not that it too plainly shows this widow's desire to defraud the daughter as well as all the others interested in this estate. That this is true, is proven by this other document which I hold in my hand, wherein the widow demands that all this property be set off to her at these prices and leave the daughter with empty hands, who, finding that such was likely to be the case, sought this woman and begged for some trifling memento by which to remember her dead mother's home, only to have her request denied, even though the daughter offered thrice the price the widow pays. In the light of these revelations, this appraisement amounts to more than an injustice—it is a crime ! And if your honor decides that we have shown sufficient reason for setting aside this appraisement, we will show that Webster Graham, acting as an executor, was present at the time this appraisement was

made, and, as unaccountable as it may seem, did in many cases induce these appraisers to lower their valuation, which they the more readily consented to do as they considered him to be more interested in advancing rather than unjustly lowering their valuation. If, then, we take the absurdities as I have outlined them—the acts of Webster Graham and the injustice to the daughter—we have good and sufficient reason to ask that this appraisement be set aside and a new appraisement be ordered.”

Mrs. Graham was now livid with rage, and darkly scowled upon Arthur and Edith, while Webster writhed under the lashings of Mr. Blood.

“Your Honor, we should like to put Webster Graham upon the stand,” continued Mr. Blood.

“Let him be sworn,” was Judge Winters’ only reply.

As Webster stood with uplifted hand while he took the oath, it was plain to see that he was not a willing sacrifice.

“Were you present when this appraisement was made?” asked Mr. Blood.

“Yes, sir, I was,” replied Webster, in an injured tone.

“Did you suggest to the appraisers that the amounts agreed upon by them were too high?”

“Yes, I did, because—”

“Never mind the because,” interrupted Mr. Blood.

“Did they lower the prices when you suggested it?”

“In most cases.”

“Could you furnish this house in its present condition for five hundred dollars?”

“No, because—”

“Never mind why,” quickly interposed Mr. Blood.

“Could you for double this sum?”

“I think not,” replied Webster, reluctantly.

“That’s all. Now, your Honor,” continued Mr. Blood, “we desire that Mrs. Graham take the stand.”

“Let Mrs. Graham take the witness stand,” said Judge Winters, brusquely.

“You lived in a very aristocratic neighborhood, did you not, Mrs. Graham?” began Mr. Blood.

“I suppose so,” was her curt reply.

“You went in the best society, did you not?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Mrs. Graham, haughtily.

“Your house was elegantly furnished, was it not?”

“No, sir, it was not.”

“Well, we may differ as to the meaning of words,” said Mr. Blood, with a quizzical smile, “but your house was as well furnished as your neighbors, was it not?”

“No, sir; it was not,” replied Mrs. Graham, determinedly.

“Could you buy what your house contained for five hundred dollars?”

“I think not.”

“Could you for double that?”

“I cannot say.”

“Are you able to account for the low valuation of this personal property?” inquired Mr. Blood, with a searching glance at the witness.

“I can only say that our house was not furnished as well as it should have been,” replied Mrs. Graham, bitterly, “and I have often been ashamed of its shabby appearance when friends were visiting us.”

“Was this always its condition, or was it so for only a short time?”

“Almost always,” replied Mrs. Graham, with a sigh.

“Why was this? Why was it not in keeping with your surroundings?” inquired Mr. Blood, with well-feigned surprise.

“Mr. Graham was not so disposed,” replied Mrs. Graham, impatiently.

“Rather miserly, eh?” queried Mr. Blood, encouragingly.

“Well—yes, if it must be made known,” replied Mrs. Graham, with apparent reluctance.

“Is it not a fact that he spent several thousand dollars in renewing and furnishing the house only a few months before he died?” inquired Mr. Blood, indignantly.

“He did some repairing,” replied Mrs. Graham, reluctantly.

“Bought new carpets and furniture, did he not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You would hardly call that miserly, would you?”

“Not that particular act.”

“Mrs. Graham,” said Mr. Blood, sternly, “you have made the statement under oath that your husband spent ten thousand dollars a year for living expenses; if, now, as you have just stated, he was a miser, how do you reconcile these statements?”

“I am not anxious to argue the case,” replied Mrs. Graham, tartly.

“No!” said Mr. Blood, as like a flash he turned upon her his eyes blazing with indignation, “but you were so

anxious to succeed that you forgot what you were before your marriage, and consented to insult your husband's memory by declaring him to be a miser."

"I object ! I object !" shouted Mr. Skinner. "The witness is entitled to protection from the court against such insults."

"I am done," said Mr. Blood, as he complacently waited for the witness to retire.

Mr. Blood's well-merited rebuke only the more firmly settled Mrs. Graham's friends in their decision that Edith was entirely at fault and responsible for this outrageous treatment, as they were pleased to call the actions of Mr. Blood, and the deprecating looks that they turned upon Edith as she sat near them only tended to make her position the more uncomfortable.

"Your Honor, this is an outrage that should receive the attention of the court," began Mr. Skinner, as Mrs. Graham left the stand ; "and as a warning I trust it will not go without its just punishment. This lady is entitled to protection at your hands."

"It is a well known principle in law," began Mr. Blood, dryly, "that they who demand justice must first be just ; and if this case does not show that they do not wish to be just, it shows nothing. I will not take the responsibility of saying who is responsible, the attorney representing the other side may do that ; but the fact is plain that this whole proceeding to-day as carried out by them is a most dishonorable attempt at robbery and one that does full credit to the well-known reputation of the attorney for the executors ; and for him to now make these loud calls for pro-

tection, when he finds his plans are falling to the ground, is too great a travesty upon justice to merit the serious consideration of the court."

"It is always the duty of a good judge to remove the cause of litigation," said Judge Winters, without noticing the wrangle between the attorneys, "and if the parties interested can agree and induce the appraisers to bring in a report awarding one-half the former amount for the widow's award, and raise the valuation of the personal property to double the former amount, it will be approved by the court. If this is not done, new appraisers will have to be appointed and the work done over, by which the expense will be greatly increased."

"That is satisfactory to us, Mr. Blood," whispered Arthur.

"It is a big steal yet," replied Mr. Blood.

"I know it is," said Arthur, "but we gained our point and settled the question of who was right; beside which, the excitement has made Edith very tired."

"We are satisfied," said Mr. Blood, rising to his feet.

"We will consent to that," said Mr. Skinner, after he had consulted with Mrs. Graham.

"Call the next case," was Judge Winter's only reply.

As Edith and Arthur started to leave, Mrs. Graham arose, and, standing directly in their path, scowled darkly at them as they passed.

"What makes you tremble so, Edith?" inquired Arthur, as they reached the door.

"I always do in her presence," replied Edith, with a shudder. "Did you see the way she looked at me? I was almost certain she intended to do me some injury."



"She would not dare do that, Edith, but her eyes plainly showed the hatred she felt, for they fairly blazed as we passed her."

"I know how they looked," said Edith, trembling at the thought; "I can see them yet."

"She is foolish to show so plainly that she feels her defeat," said Arthur, with a smile of satisfaction.

"But she gets her award," replied Edith, with a questioning look at Arthur.

"Yes, Edith, there seems to be no help for that; but we reduced it one-half, and I guess she begins to feel that she is accountable to more than 'her God and the judge.'"

"Your plausible theories did not stand the test, Mr. Skinner," said Mrs. Graham, bitterly, when she was again seated in his office. "You gave me to understand that if we had these appraisers appointed I should get so large an award as to satisfy me. They were appointed, but you failed me at the most vital point."

"I had not counted upon such strong opposition from them," replied Mr. Skinner, uneasily, "and had every assurance in the world that we were safe; for it does not occur once in an age that Judge Winters will set aside an appraiser's report, and it takes the strongest evidence that can be produced to make him do so. Looking at it in that light, you can hardly censure me for believing that we were secure."

"But you gave me positive assurances that no efforts on Edith's part could cause us trouble or defeat our plans," persisted Mrs. Graham. "This has not proven true—why?"

Mr. Skinner found his position still less pleasant than when he was in court, and did not relish the matter of fact questions which Mrs. Graham was placing before him.

“ You may more readily understand the difficulties I had to contend with,” continued Mr. Skinner, “ when I tell you that there was but one point at which the amount of this award could have been successfully attacked, and that was the very point upon which they bore with such crushing weight. The judge would not have listened for a moment to any theories that it cost your family no more to live than that of others equally wealthy, and, as I have said, there was but one point and one way. This they used in a masterly manner ; and when they produced the books to show that Mr. Graham could not and did not expend that amount for his whole family, it left no other course for the judge but to reduce the award. Arguments against so doing could not be made, and would have been useless had they been. Mr. Blood did not get these facts together, it was Arthur ; for he was the only one who could have known about Mr. Graham’s business, and I feel certain that Mr. Blood did not. It was a masterly stroke, and did its work well.”

“ So you are not content with being defeated, after having all the advantage to begin with, but must compliment your victor !” said Mrs. Graham, with bitter scorn.

“ I only do so, Mrs. Graham, in order that you may the more readily realize your position. And fully understand me when I say that we must use every means in our power to cause them to abandon this opposition, even if they have to feel the iron heel. This must be your course ; or if you

object to severe measures, then use every effort to conciliate them as soon as possible."

"I shall make the terms, not they!" said Mrs. Graham, passionately. "I am dictator, and while I am I will hear to no conciliation!"

"But are you sure you can make them feel that power?" inquired Mr. Skinner, doubtfully.

"I am!" replied Mrs. Graham, fiercely; "but I need your advice. I have tried persuasion, and failed; I have made them realize that their friends have deserted them, that their relatives ignored them and were incensed at their actions. Edith's closest friends have almost spat upon her. I have used all the pressure of the church society against them; I have driven them from the church itself—and all to no purpose. Their sense of shame and disgrace seems blunted, and Arthur carries his head as high and is as fearless as ever. He gives no signs of faltering in his purpose, or that he realizes his position."

Mr. Skinner was lost in admiration of this woman as she stood before him, her eyes glowing with the intensity of her passions as she recalled her fruitless efforts to stay the course of the rebellious daughter. Never had he seen her in the light he now beheld her—a woman whom he was now ready to acknowledge as his superior, and yet he could but admire her.

"I still have one hope," continued Mrs. Graham, with a look of fiendish delight in its contemplation. "I have it in my power to ruin him if he does not give in. The building in which he is doing business belongs to the estate, and he is in my power."

"And you will raise his rent, I dare say?" interposed Mr. Skinner, with a grin of satisfaction.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Graham, "and to such an extent as you little dream of."

"It would not be wise to raise it too much, or he may move," said Mr. Skinner, warningly.

"There is where I have him in my power," replied Mrs. Graham, confidently. "By the kindness of Mr. Graham he was given the use of this building rent free, and when Edith was married it was understood that this rent should be a part of her marriage portion. I am now free to raise his rent at once and to any figure I desire; and he cannot move, for the reason that there is not a vacant store near him, and to move away entirely would lose him the work of years. He knows what the result would be as well as I. He must pay what I demand; there is no doubt of that. Now, I want you to tell me if there is any legal objection."

"Are you sure that he has no written agreement that will protect him?" inquired Mr. Skinner.

"I am certain he has not. The only agreement was a verbal one between Mr. Graham and himself, and was never referred to after it was first entered into."

"Then I see no legal objection; but would you dare to resort to such desperate measures?" inquired Mr. Skinner, doubtfully.

"Dare!" said Mrs. Graham, scornfully. "Ha! If the law permits it I'll do it."

"It is well worth the trial," said Mr. Skinner, now convinced that his troubles would soon be at an end.

And so it was decided that Arthur should feel the iron grinding deeper and deeper into his soul.

## CHAPTER XV.

### I AM CORNERED AND AT BAY.

It was but a short time after Mrs. Graham's conversation with Mr. Skinner that Arthur received word from her that she desired to see him, as she was now ready to take charge of all the business relating to the estate.

In answer to her request, Arthur entered the house, where he was most cordially greeted by Mrs. Graham and by her ushered into the presence of uncle Webster.

"Draw up to the family circle, Arthur," began Mrs. Graham, graciously. And as Arthur took the proffered chair, she asked : "How is Edith's health ? I trust she is well."

"Yes, very well, thank you," replied Arthur, not to be outdone in diplomacy.

"I am pleased to hear it," replied Mrs. Graham. "I have intended to call and see her for some time, but something has always prevented."

"Edith has been expecting a call from you," replied Arthur, thinking of how Edith feared that she might. "But I came in answer to your request to make a final settlement with you. I am ready and await your pleasure."

"O, yes," replied Mrs. Graham, as if the pleasure she

experienced by reason of his presence had made her for the moment forget it. "As uncle Webster is anxious to return home, we thought it would be best to have all the business well in hand before he leaves, and for that purpose sent for you to give us the names of all the tenants, the amount each one pays, and turn over to us the money you have collected."

"I can do that very easily," replied Arthur, as he enumerated the amounts and names; "and here is the money, for which, if you find it correct, you may give me a receipt and then my business is ended."

"Mrs. Graham eagerly reached forward, and taking the money carefully counted it, and after comparing the amount with Arthur's statement, wrote him a receipt in a plain, bold hand, that showed no signs of faltering, then carefully folding it she handed it to him, saying :

"I will now relieve you of your duties, Arthur, and as I shall take full charge of the estate I will not require your services after this time."

"I have no objection to that," replied Arthur, coolly.

"In regard to the property," continued Mrs. Graham, "I find that we have a complete record of all but one piece."

"And which one is that?" inquired Arthur.

"We find that the store you occupy is not mentioned," replied Mrs. Graham, quietly.

"I supposed we all understood the arrangement between Mr. Graham and myself, by which it was agreed that this rent was to be a part of Edith's marriage portion," said Arthur, with no little astonishment.

"I never heard of any such agreement, did you, Web-

ster?" said Mrs. Graham, with well-feigned astonishment, as she turned toward him.

"I never heard of it," was Webster's positive reply.

"If there was an agreement of this kind I am surprised that I did not know of it," continued Mrs. Graham; "when were the papers signed?"

"There were no papers," said Arthur, as he quickly realized his defenceless position; "it was only a verbal agreement, Mrs. Graham, and you knew of it; you know that many times it was spoken of in your presence."

"I think you must be mistaken, Arthur," replied Mrs. Graham, with well-feigned surprise; "but even if this were so, you can readily see that this building is a valuable piece of property and you should be willing to pay your proportion of rent, and should not consider it unfair if in this way we asked you to help us pay the heavy expenses incurred in settling the estate."

"With the understanding that all shall be treated alike," replied Arthur, "I will consent to pay rent for my store."

"In what way do you mean that all should be treated alike?" inquired Mrs. Graham, doubtfully.

"I mean that, realizing the necessity for administering the affairs of the estate economically, as I judge you must from what you have just said, you will agree to pay rent for this house."

"Most assuredly I shall not," replied Mrs. Graham, indignantly.

Arthur turned an inquiring look upon uncle Webster, but he continued his idle tapping on the arm of his chair, and made no reply, his usefulness seemingly rested entirely



in the assurance that his presence gave of harmony in the acts of the executors.

“And what is the amount that you have decided I must pay?” queried Arthur.

“Six thousand dollars a year is the price we have decided upon, though we ought to get more,” replied Mrs. Graham, complacently.

“I will not pay it,” quickly replied Arthur. “The price is out of all reason. My business would not justify me in trying to pay it, and, more than this, the stores on either side of me are rented for very much less.”

“But these are old rates, and we are advancing prices on all new leases in order to meet expenses, of which the item of litigation is no small part,” replied Mrs. Graham, significantly.

“If these expenses are so great, Mrs. Graham, why are you not willing to contribute your share?”

“You speak as if there was no difference in our positions,” replied Mrs. Graham, bursting into tears at the thought.

But with him her tears were unavailing. The ruin that stared him in the face made him desperate, and as he slowly rose from his seat, and resting one hand upon the table that stood between them, waited for her to brush away her tears, his eyes gave warning of what she might expect.

“Yes, there is a difference in our positions,” began Arthur, with low, intense tones. “As executrix, you have been placed in the position where you can insult, abuse and rob my wife without fear of the consequences; where

you can use a large part of this estate without paying rent, while you force me to the brink of ruin. In this you are supported by the brother of the man who made you all that you are or ever hope to be. My position is one where, without a protest, I must assent to your robbing this estate, and see the wreck of Edith's friends and your triumphs over her, while I stand idly by, powerless to move you either by the picture of the ruin you have wrought, or by pleas for mercy."

"And you!" continued Arthur, turning upon Webster Graham, who was now cowering in the corner where he sat, "you were placed in the position you hold for the purpose of defending the interests of the daughter, instead of doing which you are but the servile tool of this woman, who, without a protest from you, casts reproach upon your dead brother's name, and publicly proclaims him a miser. That is the difference in our positions—is the picture a pleasing one?"

As Arthur ceased speaking and his uplifted hand slowly dropped to his side, he could but notice that his words had had their effect. Mrs. Graham had found consolation in her tears, while Webster sat as one paralyzed by the thought of the fearful retribution that seemed to be impending. Finding no response, Arthur slowly turned and left the room, and reaching the outer door was about to depart, when, hearing his name called, he turned and saw uncle Webster, who now made his appearance as an ambassador of peace, and with much volubility assured Arthur that they would carefully look into the merits of the case before coming to a final decision.

Arthur's excitement had not entirely disappeared by the time he reached home, and Edith quickly surmised that his visit had not been without its unpleasant features.

"Now you must tell me all about it," said Edith, vivaciously, as she seated herself near him; "what did they say?"

"It seems that Mrs. Graham is not content with what she has already done," began Arthur, moodily, "for she now proposes to drive me out of the store, or force me to pay such a rent as would ruin me."

"But she cannot do that Arthur, for she knows as well as we that father gave you that store rent free forever, and as a part of my marriage portion," said Edith, reassuringly.

"Yes, Edith, I know that, and so does she; but there are no papers by which I can prove it. I can stand the loss of friends and all the falsehoods she has told, but when she forces me to this it makes me desperate."

"But, Arthur, uncle Webster will surely prevent her from doing us this wrong?"

"Uncle Webster," said Arthur, bitterly, "is only a weak imbecile. Her superior will carries his judgment just as she desires, and I told him so. I was furious, and talked to her as I never talked to a woman before. I don't know just what I did say, but when I finished, I had time to walk the whole length of the hall before they recovered from the shock. It may have been unwise, but I could not help it. I have seen your misery and felt that she was its cause, with no chance to defeat its bitter work; and when they gave me this opportunity I eagerly accepted it, and feel better for the relief it has afforded me. The consequences

we must meet as they arise. It seems as if the law and humanity were our enemies, and every man's hand against us, because we dare to ask for justice. Could they show me one single proof that we are wrong, I would stop at once ; but they have not and cannot. O, Edith, I have never felt the need of father Graham's wise counsel and advice as I do now!"

Edith's eyes were filled with tears as she silently contemplated the dark and dismal vista that was presented to her sight.

"O, Edith," said Arthur, in despair, "will you not help me, can you not tell me what we should do? For I have at last come to where a solid wall is before me, while behind me I hear the bloodhounds that seek my life. I am cornered and at bay!"

"You said you would ask no quarter, Arthur," replied Edith, with downcast eyes ; "and I would rather starve than have you do it now."

"Nor will I until I am compelled to ; but this care and worry is telling on me, and I am bending under the strain."

"That does not sound like my brave boy," said Edith, throwing her arms around his neck. "You are tired and discouraged now, but you have said you would fight the old dragon until she cried for pity, and I believe you will. These dark days cannot last much longer." And Edith's bravery all forsook her as she again realized the depth of her misery, while the tears filled her eyes—a child of misery baptized in tears.

The next morning Arthur rose with buoyant spirits, and was greatly surprised by Edith's wondering look as she inquired:

“Have you so soon forgotten your troubles, Arthur; have your cares flown with the night?”

“I guess I was a little discouraged last night, now that I look back at it,” replied Arthur, with a laugh. “But you see I lay awake long into the night with my thoughts as my companions, and as they voluntarily moved about, here touching a tender spot, and there resting quietly upon some act well done, I began to realize that I was gradually returning to myself again, while thought on thought was piled until one of these midnight watchers whispered in my ear, ‘He only earns his freedom and existence who daily conquers hate anew.’ So greatly was I impressed that I again renewed the struggle with the storm of fate, and as I battled with the invisible foe I thought I saw an outstretched hand, and as it came nearer I beheld father Graham, who, with a kindly smile, quoted those beautiful words of Lowell:

‘Once to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide,  
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side.’

I could only hide my face with my hands, while the tears of joy unbidden came, and then, anxious to tell him all, I opened my eyes only to realize that it was morning.”

“It must have been a vision, Arthur,” said Edith, joyfully. “The worst is over, I feel sure it is.”

“No, Edith, it was but the vain imaginings of a disordered brain, but it has cheered and strengthened me as nothing else could have done, for I now feel almost sure that our course would be considered right by him if he were here. Thus again my armor is repaired, and I, your faithful knight, am ready to battle for my lady fair.”

"You were very blue last night, Arthur," said Edith, archly ; "and though it does my heart good to see you once more yourself, I fear the cause is not yet removed."

"He that is down need no longer fear fickle fortune's power, for he can fall no lower ; and if the returning tide moves him at all, it can only be to help."

"You are all poetry and song this morning," said Edith, laughing ; "last night it was doubt and dark despair."

"And yours the stout heart when I despair, the steady wheel-horse when I would run away. But such should a man's helpmeet be that cheers and steadies him by his opposite. But as you say, Edith, I am jubilant now, while last night I was desperate. But the mystery is easily solved ; for if you will take the pendulum of a clock and draw it until it almost breaks, you will find when you let go that it swings without your aid as far the other way. So Mrs. Graham drew me to the point where I bent under the strain, and every sense of right and justice quivered in her grasp ; now the pendulum has swung to the other side, and in a short time will settle down to the even methodical vibration that carries us through the world with the least amount of friction and care."

"You had better walk to the store this morning," said Edith, her eyes twinkling with merriment ; "the cool air will do you good."

"That hint is strong enough to move a mountain," replied Arthur, fully appreciating Edith's thrust ; "it is double headed, and pointed at both ends."

"It is just as well that you should learn that the brains of this family don't all lie on the Howard side," said Edith, with mock seriousness, as she opened the door for him.

“I do not wish to quarrel with you,” said Arthur, solemnly quoting Mrs. Graham’s words.

“Then be just to your wife,” replied Edith, as with a laugh she closed the door.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### GREEK MEETS GREEK.

After his last experience with Mrs. Graham, Arthur and Edith no longer made any attempt to keep up the appearance of friendship that had until this time existed ; and when, a few days afterward, Mrs. Graham made her appearance in his store, Arthur met her with a very cool salutation.

“I came,” began Mrs. Graham, with book and pencil in hand, “to collect your rent,” and then, smiling at Arthur’s look of surprise, she continued, “you know it is the first of the month and I desire to show no partiality. You are prepared to pay, are you not?”

“No,” replied Arthur, calmly, “I am not ready now.”

“When will you be?” questioned Mrs. Graham, with cool complacency.

“Never!” replied Arthur, firmly. “I told you that I would not when you first mentioned it. I meant what I said then, and I mean it now.”

“Are you prepared to take the consequences of this rash decision?” said Mrs. Graham, with an inquiring smile.

“I am,” said Arthur, defiantly ; “do your worst.”

“I feel very sorry for you, Arthur, for I fear that you

have allowed your hot temper to decide your course. You are placing yourself in a dangerous position, and I feel that I should warn you of it."

"I appreciate your friendship, Mrs. Graham," replied Arthur, coldly, "but I must disregard your friendly warning, for all that."

"Do you know that I can force you to vacate these premises," demanded Mrs. Graham, fiercely; "that you will not be able to rent a store near here; that to move away will ruin you and your family will starve?"

"I am fully aware of all you say, Mrs. Graham, and have dared you to do your worst. Your temporizing only exposes your weakness, for if you felt sure that you could make me yield you would have no reason to urge me to change my course."

"I only do so as a friend," replied Mrs. Graham, placidly. "You are young and liable to decide upon a course of action which you will afterward regret."

"Your acts belie your words," said Arthur, turning fiercely upon her. "I may be unfortunate in being young, I may be indiscreet, but I would rather trust to my youth with all its follies than to the advice of such a friend as you."

"And yet you are trusting that my friendship will keep me from doing what you foolishly dare me to do," replied Mrs. Graham, with a sneer.

"Were I to do that," replied Arthur, earnestly, "you would in truth have reason to call me foolish. No, Mrs. Graham, I know you too well to hope for pity or relenting on your part; but you make a mistake when you imagine

that because I do not rave and threaten that I do not mean all I say. I know the worldly-wise cunning that makes your will a power that cannot be ignored, and when to this is added the only lacking feature of a dead conscience, I do not wonder that you question my decision ; but knowing all this, I dare you to do your worst, and if you ever hear me cry for pity, laugh at me as you did the other night when I asked you to be reasonable and just."

"Then you will not pay your rent?" demanded Mrs. Graham, threateningly.

"Never!"

"I think I had better leave you to consider the matter while I see the other tenants," said Mrs. Graham, hesitatingly, "and when I return I will take your final answer," and unaided she found her way to the door.

Arthur's lips curled with a smile of scorn as his eyes followed her retreating form. "She is hardly prepared for the reception in store for her," thought Arthur, as he returned to his desk, where he was soon again occupied with his work.

The rustling of silks as Mrs. Graham glided into his office gave him warning of her return.

"Arthur," said Mrs. Graham, her voice indicating the intensity of her excitement, "Mr. Blakemoor refuses to pay me his rent!"

"Well?" inquiringly replied Arthur, without looking up.

"What shall we do?" gasped Mrs. Graham.

"We have nothing to do with it," replied Arthur, coolly.

"Well, what shall I do?" replied Mrs. Graham, exasperated at his coolness.

“O, I think you are ‘perfectly able to attend to all such little matters as these,’” replied Arthur, his eyes still fastened upon his work.

“If you were to go to him, Arthur, you could collect this money,” suggested Mrs. Graham, appealingly. “Will you?”

Arthur slowly raised his eyes until they met hers, and then replied: “No, I will not!”

“Why, Arthur?” inquired Mrs. Graham, despairingly. “We once were such good friends—what has made this change?”

For a moment Arthur’s eyes searched her through and through, then, as he recalled the memory of Edith’s vain supplications at the feet of this heartless woman, his heart refused its sympathy and he sternly answered

“Your treatment of Edith would be reason enough; but when you refused her one keepsake from her old home, even though she paid you thrice its value, that moment our friendship ceased.”

Mrs. Graham reeled backward, and grasping the portals of the door stood irresolute a moment; then like one walking in his sleep, she turned and found her way to her carriage and was rapidly driven home.

“Are you busy, Mr. Howard?”

Arthur looked up, and seeing Mr. Blakemoor’s beaming countenance at his office door, said:

“Not particularly; come in.”

“What did the old woman say?” inquired Mr. Blakemoor, as he took the proffered seat.

“She wanted me to collect the rent for her,” replied Arthur, with a quiet smile, “but I refused.”

"Well, here it is," said Mr. Blakemoor, as he proceeded to count a roll of bills. "I don't want to keep it, but after she treated you and Edith the way she did I was determined to give her all the trouble I could, even if it cost me something.

"No, keep your money," said Arthur; "I cannot take it; she must manage this case herself. But I expected that when she entered your shop and demanded the rent you would pay her, for I thought when you told me that you should refuse her that you might be only jesting."

"No, I was in earnest," was the quick reply. "You see, I knew Edith years ago when she was a little girl and came with Mr. Graham to my shop for meat, and years before that I went to school to this old woman and she used to flog the life nearly out of me because I was so dumb. She has forgotten me, but I remember her. So when Mr. Graham died, I says to myself, now the old woman—"

"Call her Mrs. Graham," suggested Arthur.

"What for?"

"In respect to the memory of your friend, whose wife she was," said Arthur, reprovingly.

"That's so," replied Mr. Blakemoor; "it's due to his memory even though she be the old devil that she is. Well, when he died, I says, 'now she will take all she can get and leave Edith nothing;' so I watched the court pretty close, and I find I was right. I was there when the old Judge asked her that stunning question, and I almost busted when I see how pitiful she looked at her lawyer. Well, when you told me that hereafter she would collect the rent, I made up my mind that she would if she could, but that I

would lead her a long chase before she got it. So when she drove up to the door and sailed into the shop, I paid no attention to her until all my customers were waited on, and then I asked her if it was a roast or steak she wanted. She straightened up, and tapping her book with her pencil, said, 'No, I came for the rent.' I looked surprised, and asked her what rent. She replied, the rent for my shop. I told her that I always paid you my rent and did not know her. She straightened up, haughtily, and said she was the widow of Stewart Graham. I told her that that might be, but I had not the pleasure of her acquaintance. This seemed to upset her, and looking scared like, she said, 'Then you wont pay me your rent?' I replied that I would be a fool to pay my rent to any and every one who came into my shop claiming to be Stewart Graham's widow. By this time several customers were waiting for me, and as I turned to wait on them she left. So when her carriage left here I thought I would come in and tell you how I got even with my old school marm," and Mr. Blakemoor laughed until his fat sides fairly shook.

"And did she go no farther than your shop?" inquired Arthur.

"I guess not; but all the other tenants around here will do the same as I did."

"I appreciate your friendly intentions," replied Arthur, "but I am afraid the lesson was more severe than she ever gave you to learn."

"Joe Blakemoor may be rough and uneducated, Mr. Howard, but he's got a heart in him, and when he's your friend you can depend on him to talk or to fight for you."

"I believe it," replied Arthur, laughing; "and one suits you about as well as the other."

"Just about; I'm always accommodating in that way," and Joe Blakemoor chuckled at his wit as he returned to his shop.

"Well, thought Arthur, "if all the tenants are like Joe, Mrs. Graham will have a busy time in attending to 'these little matters.' The failure to get money seems to upset her more than anything else, for never before have I seen her so nearly overcome as she was to-day."

"Ahem!"

Arthur looked up with some surprise to find uncle Webster standing by his desk.

"Well, uncle," was Arthur's smiling salutation, "you came in so silently that I did not hear you; but take a seat."

Webster was evidently relieved at Arthur's cordial greeting, but his embarrassment at the importance of his mission did not entirely leave him.

Arthur quietly waited for developments, for he felt sure that Webster came as a messenger from Mrs. Graham.

"Ahem! Nice weather we are having now," began Webster, uneasily.

"Yes, uncommon for this time of year; I cannot remember of weather like this for many years, can you?" inquired Arthur, well knowing that Webster did not care to talk about the weather at any great length.

"No, but, ahem!" and Webster moved uneasily in his chair.

Arthur waited patiently.



“Arthur,” began Webster, in a loud, bold voice ; and then, as if scared at its sound, he continued in a lower tone, “some trouble with the tenants, I hear.”

“So Mrs. Graham said.”

“Refuse to pay their rent, it seems.”

“Something of that kind, I believe.”

“Said he did not know her.”

“Did he ?” inquired Arthur with well-feigned innocence.

“I wonder if it would do any good for me to see him ?” inquired Webster, doubtfully.

“You might try.”

“I don’t suppose he knows me any better than Mrs. Graham.”

“No, I suppose not,” replied Arthur, laughing ; “I don’t think he does.”

Webster sat for a moment absorbed in thought, then turning to Arthur he asked :

“Will you do me a favor ?”

“In what way ?”

“Will you collect this money for me ?”

For a moment Arthur hesitated, then replied ; “Yes, for your sake I will ; but I do not know that I can get it now.”

“Try, please,” said Webster in desperation.

Arthur was gone but a moment, and returning handed Webster the roll of money without saying a word.

“It seems easy enough when you go at it in the right way,” said Webster, evidently well pleased at Arthurs’s success.

“Did Mrs. Graham ask you to have me collect this ?” said Arthur, with a suspicion that such was the case.

"She said for me to ask you to collect it if I could not," replied Webster, reluctantly.

"It is strange," said Arthur, musingly; "she is not moved by pleas or threats, but the moment that money enters into the question she will humble herself to the earth in order to obtain it."

"We have been talking over the matter of the collection of these rents," said Webster, ignoring Arthur's remarks, "and have concluded that you can do it better than any one else."

"I thought Mrs. Graham desired to attend to that herself?"

"Her experience to-day has changed her mind," said Webster, pensively.

"I shall not attend to it," said Arthur, decisively.

"But no one else can do it, Arthur, and we expect to pay you the regular commission that others would charge us."

"If Mrs. Graham is willing to pay for her folly I will consider your proposal," replied Arthur, who was secretly only too willing to accept such an advantage. "What commission is she willing to pay?"

"Ten per cent.," replied Webster, encouragingly.

"And am I to have full charge of all the buildings down here, just the same as before?" said Arthur, inquiringly.

"Yes, just the same," replied Webster, well pleased that Arthur seemed ready to consent.

"I will attend to it," said Arthur, decisively; "but I shall deduct my commission first and then pay her the balance."

"That is perfectly satisfactory," replied Webster, with a

sigh of relief, "and you had better collect them as soon as you can."

"Shall I charge a commission on this that I have just handed you?" inquired Arthur, smiling.

"No, that was collected before the bargain was made," replied Webster, hastily withdrawing his hand in his anxiety to retain all that was in his possession; "but Mr. Skinner will give you a power of attorney to-morrow and then you will begin."

"All right," replied Arthur, well pleased at the turn of events.

Webster soon after took his leave, evidently well pleased at his success.

"Well, Edith," said Arthur, upon his return, "I have kept open house to-day and had plenty of callers. First came Mrs. Graham, with pencil and book in hand, ready to receive my rent."

"You did not pay her, did you, Arthur?"

"Not in money, but in her own coin," replied Arthur, with a smile of satisfaction. "When I refused to pay her, she first threatened, then argued; but finding neither availed, she left me to think it over while she collected the other rents. This was act number one. Scene second was located in the same place. The former prosecutor now became the supplicant; for it seems that her demand for rent was also refused by Mr. Blakemoor, and she at once returned to me for aid, the which I declined to give her, but not a word did she say about my rent. When she had gone, Mr. Blakemoor called and told me what their conversation had been, and it seems she was his 'old school

marm,' as he expressed it, and he was only too anxious to get even. Then came the last scene, where uncle Webster, after much hesitation, asks me to try and collect the rents for him. This I did, and so easily as to astonish him ; whereupon he made me the offer of ten per cent. of all the rents collected if I would consent to again take charge of the affairs, and Mr. Skinner is to give me a power of attorney, and when I get that I would like to see Mrs. Graham force me to pay this enormous rent which she proposes to rob me of. The prospect is almost too bright, Edith, and I am fearful that Mr. Skinner will spoil it all by advising her of the position it will place her in ; but to-morrow I shall know.

“If he gives you this power of attorney, as you call it, can she not still force you to pay her this six thousand dollars a year as rent ?” inquired Edith.

“No, for I will be my own landlord then, and shall not charge so much for my store as she did,” replied Arthur, laughing.

“That seems too good to be true, Arthur ; but I, too, have had an experience and must tell you of it. I called to see Miss Ashton, but she was not at home ; her mother was, and to her I told the story of Mabel’s queer actions. I soon found that her mother knew the cause, but would not inform me what it was. She said, however, that Mabel felt very much hurt by something that had occurred. I asked her if it was because of our estate troubles. She replied that while she felt that I had not done right in that respect, it would have made but little difference with her ; the real cause was of a more personal character. I tried

my best to find out what it was, but she would only say that I had better see Mabel herself and explain to her. I denied having said or thought evil of Mabel, but all to no purpose ; the answer was always the same."

"It is unfortunate that you did not find Mabel at home," said Arthur ; "and if you had requested her mother to tell her that you called to explain why the misunderstanding should not continue, I would feel that you had done your full duty."

"I did just that thing ; for when I left I asked Mrs. Ashton to be sure and tell Mabel why I called, and she promised to do so."

"Then I should make no further effort until she sought me."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A BOLD SCHEME OF ROBBERY.

“I wish you to draw up the necessary papers to give Arthur the authority to make leases and collect the rent of the down town property,” began Mrs. Graham, as she entered lawyer Skinner’s office. “I feel that he is the best one we can find to do this, and as Webster goes home to-morrow, you had best draw them at once so that he can sign them before he leaves.”

“I can draw them to-day and will send them to your house when they are finished,” replied Mr. Skinner, with a look of surprise. “But how is it that you have decided to give the collection of rents into his hands?”

“O, I have so much else to attend to that I cannot be bothered with all the detail of collecting these rents,” replied Mrs. Graham, languidly.

“But is it not unwise to ask these favors at this time?”

“We ask no favors,” replied Mrs. Graham, tartly. “He is to be paid for his trouble.”

“But that gives him the sinews of war, Mrs. Graham, and if you expect him to relent you must keep him from getting that.”

“I shall not pay him his commission until the estate is

settled or he consents to pay his rent," replied Mrs. Graham haughtily.

"Then he has not consented to your proposal?" inquired Mr. Skinner.

"No, he positively refuses to pay, and dares me to do my worst," replied Mrs. Graham, reluctantly.

"In that case I had better serve him with a notice to vacate the premises, had I not?" said Mr. Skinner, with an amused smile at her perplexity.

"Well—no, not just yet," replied Mrs. Graham, doubtfully; "I think we had better let him worry a little longer."

"Then you do not feel certain that he will yield?" said Mr. Skinner, with provoking indifference.

"Not absolutely certain," replied Mrs. Graham; "and yet I cannot see how he can help it."

"Suppose we try the effect of conciliation," suggested Mr. Skinner.

"I do not favor it," replied Mrs. Graham, decisively.

"But suppose he does not yield, what will you gain?" persisted Mr. Skinner. "If he does not, and you force him out, he will be able to cause us much trouble even though he does not defeat our purpose."

"But I will not consent to giving up my award," said Mrs. Graham, determinedly.

"O, you do not need to do that," replied Mr. Skinner, in a conciliating tone. "All that you have to do is to claim that you only take this award as a loan until the estate is settled, at which time you will pay it back, or, what is the same thing, have it charged against your share of the estate. This will make you appear to desire to take only what the



will give you, and when Arthur believes that this is your intention, he will no longer oppose you."

"You can claim all you choose, but it must not be binding upon me," replied Mrs. Graham, a little mollified by Mr. Skinner's assurances.

"But you must appear to consent to it," replied Mr. Skinner.

"Trust me for that," said Mrs. Graham, confidently.

"You must also make up your mind to share with Edith the amount you expect to take from the portion that belongs to the relatives."

"It does not belong to them!" fiercely declared Mrs. Graham. "They are only paupers, dependent upon the charity of my husband, who, had he realized the value of his property, would not have given one-third of it to these beggars."

"Have they any idea of the amount they should receive?" inquired Mr. Skinner, with some concern.

"They have no knowledge of how much they are entitled to," replied Mrs. Graham, confidently, "for I have been particular to hide from them the true condition of the estate, and on several occasions I have written them that there was but little to be had after all the debts were paid, as the property was heavily encumbered, and Edith's actions would greatly increase the expenses of settlement; so they do not expect much; a few hundred dollars to each one will fully meet their expectations."

"That is very fortunate," replied Mr. Skinner, "and I am well pleased to know that you had the foresight to prepare them for their fate."

"Trust me for that," replied Mrs. Graham, complacently.

"I have studied the matter too long to overlook such important features as this."

"But you must appear to be giving them what belongs to them," said Mr. Skinner, well pleased with the progress he was making; "however, we can arrange that afterward. Now, suppose I were to go to Arthur and assure him that you desire peace and harmony, and have his and Edith's best interests at heart; that all this trouble arises from a misunderstanding between you, rather than from any desire on your part to injure him."

"That would be a very pretty story, Mr. Skinner, but he would not believe you, for he knows better than that."

"But suppose that after I have told him this, I point out the impossibility of either one of you gaining an advantage if you continue this quarreling, and then tell him that you will consent to divide the—the spoils, as it were—how would that do?"

"Do you mean that he is to have as large a share as I?" inquired Mrs. Graham, uneasily.

"Yes, practically the same."

"I'll not consent to it," said Mrs. Graham, angrily; "I might as well get it all or lose it all."

"But the chances are that you will lose it all," replied Mr. Skinner, dryly.

"There's no use in making two bites of a cherry," said Mrs. Graham, plaintively.

"Then double the size of the cherry," suggested Mr. Skinner.

"But the relatives will not allow us to take too big a slice."

"O, they need not know about it and cannot find out," replied Mr. Skinner, confidently.

"Well, you may try it," said Mrs. Graham, thoughtfully; "but if you fail the rebel shall feel my power—tell him that."

"Well, I will see him, Mrs. Graham, and if I find him favorably inclined I will bring him to your house and you can invite us to take tea with you, and when Arthur experiences the pleasure of again being on friendly terms with you he will be only too well pleased to have it continue and will readily assent to all that we propose."

"O, but that will not do at all," said Mrs. Graham, hastily. "In the first place, Arthur is inclined to speak pretty plainly if things do not suit him; then, too, uncle Webster would be present, which would make it rather embarrassing."

"Then we must wait until Mr. Graham goes home," said Mr. Skinner; "and I will risk Arthur's disapproval if I decide to bring him to the house, for I shall not do so until I am sure that he will consent to join us."

"I shall leave you to do most of the talking," continued Mrs. Graham.

"If you will play the hospitable hostess I will willingly do the talking," replied Mr. Skinner, with a grin of satisfaction.

"O, I can easily do that," replied Mrs. Graham, smiling.

"All right, then; you let me know when Mr. Graham has gone and then I will see Arthur and fix the matter with him," replied Mr. Skinner.

Several days had passed, and yet Arthur had not obtained

his power of attorney. He began to fear that Mr. Skinner had advised against this course until after he had agreed to pay his rent. His doubts were in no measure relieved when he received a request from Mr. Skinner to call at his office, as he had some important matters that he wished to talk over.

"It must be the lease," thought Arthur, "for the other requires no discussion," and in a very uncomfortable mood he entered lawyer Skinner's office.

"I sent for you," began Mr. Skinner, pleasantly, "to explain the delay in regard to the power of attorney. I have drawn it and it is ready to be signed, but as Webster Graham has returned to his home, it will have to be sent to him for his signature, but it will get back in a few days at the farthest."

"O," said Arthur, much relieved, "I thought you wanted me to sign a lease for my store."

"No," replied Mr. Skinner, confidentially, "Mrs. Graham is not inclined to press that matter just yet. She is hoping that you will feel more friendly toward her, in which case I think she will let the matter drop."

Arthur made no reply, but quietly waited for Mr. Skinner to continue.

"I am very sorry that this trouble has arisen between you and Mrs. Graham," continued Mr. Skinner, "for it seems to me that you both are acting opposite to your best interests. I have no more reason to favor her side than yours, Arthur, and am not employed as her attorney, though I know that she seems to think I am. I went into this case with the understanding that I was to act for all the parties interested, your wife as well as any of the others. Of

course Mrs. Graham will be the one to pay me the money, but the amount is so small that I would not turn my hand over for it; so you can see that in talking as I do I have no other motive than to obtain harmony."

"What is the amount?" bluntly inquired Arthur.

"Well, you see the position she placed me in was peculiar, and I saw that if I took the case at all I would have to take it much below the regular price, and we agreed upon forty dollars."

"Not a very high priced lawyer, are you?" replied Arthur, laughing, "but I suppose there will be enough extras to help out."

"Yes, there will be some extras, but not many. This trial the other day was extra, and the estate has to pay for it; so you see that when I urge harmony I am working against my own interests."

"But you do not charge the estate for defending Mrs. Graham in her claim against it, do you?" inquired Arthur, indignantly.

"Well—I had not thought of it in that light," replied Mr. Skinner, a little disconcerted by Arthur's pointed questions; "but however that may be, you can easily understand that I am an uninterested person when I say that it is not to your interest to quarrel with Mrs. Graham. I am certain that she only needs to know what you desire in order that she may bring it about, for in a conversation with her only a few days ago she assured me that she was ready and willing to do all in her power to make you satisfied."

"She has a very peculiar way of showing her good inten-

tions," replied Arthur, sententiously. "If she is so anxious to do what is right, why does she demand her award, why does she write such insulting letters to my wife, and why does she crowd me to the wall by demanding that I pay her five hundred dollars a month as rent for my store?"

"In regard to her award," replied Mr. Skinner, quietly, "I desire to say that it is a matter that seems to be misunderstood by you and your wife; and in justice to Mrs. Graham, I would like to ask you to tell me how she could support herself during the time the estate is being settled if she did not have this award?"

"She could use the money that is collected from the tenants, Mr. Skinner, and neither Edith nor I would object to that, and in the final settlement the amount she used could be deducted from her share."

"Now, my dear boy," said Mr. Skinner, smiling at the readiness with which Arthur had fallen into the trap, "that is exactly what this award amounts to. The money that she receives on this award must come from the tenants, and in the final settlement her share is made that much less. This is just as you propose, but much better for you, for it limits the amount. So that this widow's award, concerning which there has been so much misunderstanding and trouble, might be considered as a limiting of the amount the widow can use to a certain and fixed sum."

"Are you sure that she has to pay it back?" inquired Arthur, doubtfully.

"Well, I have had considerable experience in probate law and think I know what I am talking about," replied

Mr. Skinner, well pleased at the impression his words had made upon Arthur.

“What you say looks reasonable,” replied Arthur, thoughtfully, “and if it is true, there is no reason why I should oppose her taking this award.”

“That’s it, Arthur—that’s it exactly ; and I am well pleased to find you so ready to admit your error when you are convinced that you are in the wrong.”

“I trust that I may always have the good sense to do so, Mr. Skinner ; for a person who will not admit that he is mistaken when it is proven to him, must be but a very poor apology for a man.”

“That’s true,” quickly replied Mr. Skinner ; “but Arthur, as you have been good enough to admit that you may have been mistaken in your judgment of Mrs. Graham, I can see no reason now why you should continue this quarrel. It seems to me that it would be much better to forget the past, and from this time on work with Mrs. Graham for your mutual good.”

“As far as I am concerned, I would be pleased to see this take place,” replied Arthur ; “but Mrs. Graham is not the person to willingly concede anything, and I doubt very much if she would consent to overlook our past unpleasant meetings and let the matter die a natural death.”

“That is the way she may feel if you continue to disbelieve her kindly intentions toward you,” replied Mr. Skinner, earnestly ; “but fortunately I happen to know that she is now more inclined to meet you half way than at any other time since this trouble began, and I am very anxious that you will consent to take advantage of it ; and



if we were to go there and finish the rest of our business in her presence, and in this informal manner bring about a mutual understanding, she would undoubtedly invite us to take tea with her, and everything from this time on be friendly and pleasant."

"I doubt the propriety of my going to her house without an invitation," replied Arthur, thoughtfully; "for, as you know, our feelings toward each other have been quite bitter, even though from the exterior appearance you might believe it to have been just the reverse."

"If there has been any feeling in the matter it has been on your part, Arthur," said Mr. Skinner, confidently; "for I know that Mrs. Graham desires nothing more than that she may do you justice and have an end of this trouble. This I know to be so, and earnestly desire to impress you that it is so, in order that you may not lose this opportunity that she now offers you."

"You have been deceived by appearances, Mr. Skinner," replied Arthur, confidently; "for if you think that Mrs. Graham has not and does not feel bitter hatred of Edith and myself, you do not know her feelings, that's all."

"I do not wish you to understand that I believe Mrs. Graham has always felt friendly toward you or never been angered at your actions," quickly replied Mr. Skinner. "On the contrary, I know that she has, and these letters you have spoken of are only a proof that such is the case; and yet I must say that she has often expressed more sorrow than anger at what she called your mistaken course; but the moment she knows that you admit you may have misjudged her, that moment she is ready to sweep all that

has passed into oblivion and never refer to it again. What more could you ask than this, Arthur ? ”

“ If I only felt sure that this was so, I would willingly go with you, Mr. Skinner ; but something tells me that either you or I do not understand her.”

“ There is no better way to prove the truth of what I say than to make the trial,” replied Mr. Skinner, confidently, “ and you will have no better opportunity than now. I would advise you, Arthur, for your own good, to go with me ; but beyond that comes the question of what is just and manly, and what is your duty. If you have misjudged her, your course is plain.”

“ I will go,” said Arthur, determinedly.

“ Then let us go at once,” said Mr. Skinner, anxious to have the matter settled while Arthur was favorably inclined ; and as they left his office he continued : “ We must be careful that nothing disagreeable occurs at our first meeting. She will be more or less doubtful of your friendly feelings, as, no doubt, you will be of hers ; but if we can arrange it so that this meeting shall be entirely pleasant, it will be no difficult matter to have all the others so, and for this reason I would like to have you let some of the matters that have caused ill feeling rest until some future time, with the understanding that they are then to be talked over and arranged : for if all of them were brought to her attention at this time, it might make her feel antagonistic and arouse her suspicions.”

“ I recognize the force of what you say,” replied Arthur ; “ but there is one thing that I must ascertain before I will consent to discharge Mr. Blood, and that is, if she intends

to pay to the estate the amount of her award, or if she intends to take it in excess of what the will gives her."

"O, certainly, that would be no more than right," replied Mr. Skinner, a little uneasy at Arthur's persistence in clinging to the main question; "but what I mean is, that it would be unwise to ask her about the letters she wrote your wife, and this and that, all at our first meeting; for you can see that it might be very aggravating to her under the circumstances, and much better to defer it until some other time. Now you can decide what questions you desire to have settled first and ask them, but let the others wait until some future time."

"I shall do nothing to aggravate her, Mr. Skinner, and I hope she will be as considerate toward me; but the question that must be decided is this one of the award."

Mr. Skinner was evidently in doubt how Mrs. Graham would answer this question, and as they neared her residence it became apparent that he did not feel confident of the success of his mission, and with his mind thus occupied his conversation became more and more restrained until, as they stood upon the steps while waiting the servant's appearance at the door, his usual volubility entirely deserted him and silence fell upon them.

"It would place me in a very disagreeable position," thought Arthur, "if he has invited me here under a misapprehension of her feelings and without a knowledge that she would consent to reconciliation, and from his apparent nervousness I am half inclined to believe that this is the case; but I will keep my eyes open and let them do the talking until I find out."

As Mrs. Graham entered the room, her eyes sought Mr. Skinner's for some indication of Arthur's intentions, and finding him worried and unusually quiet, she turned toward Arthur and acknowledged his presence only by a cold and formal inclining of her head in the direction in which he sat; meeting with as formal an acknowledgment, she seated herself and awaited Mr. Skinner's pleasure.

"He was very foolish to bring me here," thought Arthur, as he watched Mr. Skinner's efforts to appear easy in Mrs. Graham's presence.

Mrs. Graham's lips slightly curled with scorn as she surveyed the pitiable picture that Mr. Skinner presented, as she inquired:

"And to whom am I indebted for the pleasure of your presence?"

"I brought Arthur here in accordance with our agreement," began Mr. Skinner, but quickly recognizing by the angry glance of Mrs. Graham that he had made a mistake, he awkwardly hesitated a moment and then continued—"so that he might pay you the money he had collected."

Arthur could hardly repress a smile as he recognized Mr. Skinner's blundering attempt to open the conversation.

"You must mean the power of attorney," replied Mrs. Graham, smiling at Mr. Skinner's confusion, "for we have had a full settlement of all that he has collected, and I think Arthur so understands it."

"I hold a receipt for all that I have collected," replied Arthur.

"O, yes, I mean the power of attorney," replied Mr. Skinner, hastily correcting himself. "I told him that it

would not reach him for a few days, as we had met with some delays."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Graham, inquiringly.

"It looks very much as if his attempt at reconciliation would fail," thought Arthur, while Mrs. Graham's face plainly showed the disgust she felt at the blundering manner in which Mr. Skinner was handling the matter.

"I cannot mention the former misunderstanding now," thought Mr. Skinner, "for it would only complicate matters; and as she shows no disposition to aid me, I must see Arthur alone and tell him all our plans and get his consent, and then I can settle the matter with her."

"I only wanted you to confirm what I have already told him," said Mr. Skinner, with a look that she could not misunderstand; and rising, he continued: "As you have done so, I think we had better be going."

"I am sorry that you find it necessary to hurry away," replied Mrs. Graham, a little sarcastically, and then turning to Arthur she asked: "And when shall I see you again?"

"I cannot say," replied Arthur, "I have but little time for calling."

"I should be pleased to see you at any time," said Mrs. Graham, graciously.

"I shall remember your invitation, and will call when I have any important business I wish to transact, and will be free to tell you what it is," replied Arthur, with ill-concealed merriment.

Mrs. Graham's only answer was a smile, as she recognized the application of his reply.

"I thought you said Mrs. Graham would invite us to take tea with her?" said Arthur, with a half malicious smile, when they were out of her hearing.

"So I did, Arthur, but I must have counted without my hostess; but we can adjourn to some other table, and with a host equally as agreeable. I was not well pleased with her reception of us, and would not have staid if she had asked me. But let us go in here and get a table by ourselves, where we can talk the matter over while we are eating," and followed by Arthur he entered one of the elegantly furnished restaurants which abound in every large city, and motioning Arthur to a table in one of the most secluded corners, took a seat facing him. Here he felt at ease, and met with more success in bringing his conversation to bear upon the subject he desired to make known.

"Mrs. Graham knew why we called," began Mr. Skinner, "but she was so much embarrassed by the memory of past occurrences that she would give me no opportunity to approach the subject."

"Was she the only one who felt that way, Mr. Skinner?" inquired Arthur, with a knowing smile.

"I do not wonder that you felt it," replied Mr. Skinner, without appearing to understand Arthur's meaning, "but I was so intently watching her in hopes that she would open the way for me that I did not notice it."

"But I could not help but notice your embarrassment," replied Arthur, laughing, "it was so very apparent."

"I was more provoked than embarrassed," replied Mr. Skinner, testily.

“I think it would be very interesting to witness one of your conferences in relation to estate matters if you are always so formal as you were to-day.”

“O, we have no trouble in that way,” replied Mr. Skinner; “but I think it was her doubts of how you were disposed to act that made her so formal. You see she is very proud and dislikes to appear to be the first to make concessions, but as soon as she knows your intentions she will readily assent and once more become friendly, and this mutual understanding was what I was anxious to bring about; for, as I told you this afternoon, it is much better for all of the interested parties to agree and work peaceably together, but in the case of yourself and Mrs. Graham it is absolutely necessary; your interests are identical, they lie in the same channel, and you must gain or lose together.”

Mr. Skinner’s manner had changed, and he was now so earnest in what he was saying that Arthur wondered what the cause could be. “He has some object in trying to impress me in this way,” he thought, “or something of importance to tell me, and I will wait and see.”

“I have told Mrs. Graham the same as I have just told you,” continued Mr. Skinner, “and she fully realizes its great importance; and if now you and Mrs. Graham were to become friends once more, and work together, it would result in a gain to each of you of many thousands of dollars.”

“I cannot see how,” replied Arthur, doubtfully, “unless you mean that we would be saved the expense of litigation, and I would not be required to pay this fearfully high rent.”



“That would be one way, Arthur ; for, as I told you, Mrs. Graham is not inclined to press that matter except as a last resort. But this is not the most important reason ; for if you and Mrs. Graham could agree, she would, no doubt, let you continue without paying rent, just as Mr. Graham intended you should.”

“How did you find that out ?” demanded Arthur, quickly.

“O, I don’t remember just how I found it out, Arthur ; but never mind that now.”

“Then you do know that there was an agreement that I should pay no rent for that store ?” demanded Arthur.

“I understood in some way that you were to have the store rent free so long as Mr. Graham lived, or something of that kind,” replied Mr. Skinner, uneasily.

“If you understood it at all, you understood that it was forever,” said Arthur, decisively.

“Well, we can discuss that at some other time,” replied Mr. Skinner, anxious to change the subject.

“I do not care to argue the point, Mr. Skinner ; I am satisfied to know that Mrs. Graham understands it as it was, and now I know that she does, even though she has denied it.”

“That is a matter that is very easily settled, Arthur,” continued Mr. Skinner ; “for if you and Mrs. Graham can agree, I know she will be willing to carry out that agreement and take your word as to what it was ; but a much more important matter than that is for you to agree how you would like to have the property divided. It will soon become necessary for the court to appoint three or

more persons to divide and apportion it to the parties interested. Now, if you and Mrs. Graham could decide upon these persons, and choose only those whom you could depend upon to do as you desire, it would be no difficult matter to have the court appoint them."

"In other words," interposed Arthur, with a knowing smile, "it would be the same as in the appraisement of the personal property and widow's award."

"After this was accomplished," continued Mr. Skinner, without noticing Arthur's interruption, "you and Mrs. Graham could decide upon the pieces of property you desire to take and have these appraisers set a very low valuation upon them—very low; and the small portion that remains for the others, the charity folks, as Mrs. Graham calls them, let their portion be appraised very high. In this way you and Mrs. Graham will get nearly all of the property, while the small portion allotted to the others will fully meet their expectations; for Mrs. Graham has already made them believe that there will be but little coming to them, as the estate is greatly in debt. In this way you and Mrs. Graham will get the difference between what they will receive and what the will gives them. Now, Arthur, isn't that a splendid scheme?" inquired Mr. Skinner, as he leaned back in his chair and rubbed his hands in glee.

"But, sir, this is nothing less than robbery!" said Arthur, in astonishment.

"Aye, so it is, Arthur; but you get your full share of it."

"And does Mrs. Graham consent to this?" demanded Arthur.

"O, yes; I obtained her consent before I came to you."

"You explained it to her just as you have to me, and she gave her consent?" inquired Arthur, earnestly.

"Yes, fully; and she not only consented, but urged me to see you. O, she is all right; you need have no fears concerning her," replied Mr. Skinner, as he leaned forward and looked earnestly at Arthur.

"I have believed her to be capable of almost any crime, now I know her to be!" said Arthur, with passionate emphasis.

Mr. Skinner started back in amazement at this unexpected denouement, and after surveying Arthur for a moment, said, hoarsely: "Then you will not accept this offer?"

"No, sir, I will not! These people that Mrs. Graham proposes to rob are my relatives, and I shall see to it that they know of this," replied Arthur, his eyes flashing with indignation.

"That is a very pretty theory, Arthur, and quite sentimental," replied Mr. Skinner, sneeringly, "but it is far from being good business policy; for these same relatives, if they had the chance that I now offer you, would accept it at once, and this, too, regardless of their relationship to you or your wife. Now, Arthur, don't foolishly decide this matter while your blood is up, for it is only once in a lifetime that such an offer is made. You need take no part in it, and need not inquire where it comes from, or how. Mrs. Graham and I will manage that, and you need only to quietly acquiesce. It is too important a matter to be lightly disposed of, and you should well consider it before you decide."

“I will not even consider it,” said Arthur, vehemently; “and you can tell Mrs. Graham that I say she is but little better than a common thief.”

“Beware how you decide, Arthur,” replied Mr. Skinner, now thoroughly enraged. “If your business is worth preserving, or if you hope to get any portion of this estate, take heed before it is too late, for Mrs. Graham has you in her power. You have experienced some of the misery she is able to inflict upon you, and she only waits for your decision to make that misery ten fold more woeful and ruin you beyond all hope of recovery, or aid you to obtain all that you can desire or money buy; and she has directed me to say that in case you did not consent that you should feel that power.”

“You speak truly when you say that we have felt the misery she can bestow,” replied Arthur, now deathly pale; “and though I have smiled at it, they are the smiles that only make wrinkles. I have grown to feel and expect the cares and worries of a man much older than I am, and all because of this power she wields with so heavy a hand, and which you now threaten shall be increased ten fold. I tell you this that you may know that I realize the full extent of your threat, and yet, knowing all this, I defy her! And though she had ten fold her power, and were thrice the devil that she is, I would not league with her—tell her that! Good-night, sir,” and Arthur, hot with passion, left him to his reveries.

Mr. Skinner's eyes followed Arthur as he left him, and when he disappeared from sight his eyes sought the floor while his countenance showed the dejection he felt. He

sat in this position he knew not how long, until he felt the presence of some one standing near him, and hastily looking up, saw an amused smile playing over the features of Mr. Blood, as he stood with one hand resting on the back of his chair.

“Been having a row, Skinner?”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Skinner, relieved at the opportunity of giving expression to his thoughts; “two of them.”

“One would be enough for me,” replied Mr. Blood, with exasperating coolness, “if they were all as fierce as the one I just witnessed; but what was the other.”

“Well, that scheme I told you of some time ago,” began Mr. Skinner, moodily, “resulted in an appointment at Mrs. Graham’s. I took Arthur there, and she nearly froze us with her icy formality and we adjourned here. I thought I had the thing all fixed, and was sure he was favorably inclined, and so told him everything, and up to the last moment had no doubt but that he would jump at the chance. When I had finished, he raised a great hubbub about these folks being relatives of his, and denounced the whole scheme as one of robbery.”

“Well, he was about right, was he not?” inquired Mr. Blood, sardonically.

“But he is a big fool to let so great an opportunity pass—don’t you think so, Mr. Blood?”

“Yes—as the world goes, I think he is; but this all comes from interfering with my client, Mr. Skinner.”

“But I told you all about it,” replied Mr. Skinner, hastily, “and urged you to place it before him; you declined, until I had first obtained his consent.”

"You did not get it, did you?" said Mr. Blood, with a quizzical smile.

"No," replied Mr. Skinner, bitterly, as he rose to leave. "He has upset the whole thing by prating of his relatives, and if he informs them of it he will no doubt receive a reply that will teach him a well deserved lesson."

"And is he going to do this?" inquired Mr. Blood.

"So he says."

"Well, you must have had a sorry night all round," said Mr. Blood, consolingly.

"Yes, but hereafter I shall let Mrs. Graham do her own dirty work; I am done." And Mr. Skinner drew his hat down close over his eyes and stepped out into the darkness, a prey to his thoughts.

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Mr. Blood, "Arthur must have struck him pretty hard to upset him so completely."

"What made you so late, Arthur?" inquired Edith, as he entered the house.

"I took supper with Mr. Skinner, and he unfolded a scheme for robbing the relatives, the boldness of which greatly astonished me, and wanted me to give my consent to join in it with Mrs. Graham. I let him tell the whole story, and found out that Mrs. Graham fully understood the matter and had consented to it, and then I let him know what I thought of it. When he found I would not consent to it he threatened me with Mrs. Graham's hot wrath, and gave me the choice between wealth or ruin. I denounced him and defied her and left. But what surprises me more than her dishonesty, is that they should find it necessary to have me join with them. I cannot account for

it, unless I have gained some advantage that I do not know of ; for up to this time she has been haughtily confident of success, and now needs my help or she would not seek it. If she does, I pity her."

"The relatives should be informed of this as soon as possible," said Edith, her face flushed with indignation at the thought of Mrs. Graham's intentions, "and, Arthur, you should go to them and explain the matter, so that they will be able to protect themselves."

"I have been thinking of that," said Arthur, thoughtfully, "and I am very much inclined to believe that it is my duty to go and tell them how Mrs. Graham proposes to rob them, and after talking the matter over, we can decide what should be done. For if Mrs. Graham cannot rob them now, she will only delay in doing so until your interest in the estate is settled and we are out of her way, and do it then.

"It is very plain to me that it is a duty we owe to them as relatives and friends," said Edith, earnestly.

"Yes, I think so, and I shall go," said Arthur, determinedly.

"How soon can you start?" inquired Edith, anxiously.

"O, there's no such hurry as that, Edith," replied Arthur, much amused at her haste. "Mrs. Graham can do nothing at present, and I will have plenty of time to see them."

"Well, don't put it off too long," replied Edith, anxious for the fate of her friends.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE LIE DID ITS WORK WELL.

"If you are no better lawyer than diplomat, I fear we shall fare but poorly at your hands," said Mrs. Graham the next morning, as with a smile she entered Mr. Skinner's office.

"Your manner would have chilled an iceberg," replied Mr. Skinner, gruffly, for he was in no mood for jesting. "Arthur was all right when we came to your house, but you hardly noticed him and I could see that he felt it."

"I took my cue from you," replied Mrs. Graham, pleasantly, "and your face gave me no indication that his decision had been favorable. You looked as downcast and disheartened as it was possible for your face to express, and I acted accordingly."

"But you gave me no aid, even when you realized that I would fail if you did not," replied Mr. Skinner, testily.

"But you were to do all the talking and I was only to play the hospitable hostess, and I am sure you have no reason to find fault with my part," said Mrs. Graham, with an amused smile.

"Well, the scheme has been spoiled," said Mr. Skinner, moodily.

“O, no ; not so bad as all that, Mr. Skinner,” said Mrs. Graham, banteringly. “I will invite him to come next time, and then you will see how the matter should have been managed at first.”

“You may try it if you desire,” replied Mr. Skinner, with assumed indifference, “but you will not try it the second time, I can assure you of that.”

“O, it is the lack of experience that makes the difference,” said Mrs. Graham, with an air of conscious superiority. “There is need of confidence in yourself to handle these delicate points with grace and telling effect, and this only comes by experience. If women were only allowed to practice in our courts, I think I know of some who would put many of you lawyers to the blush ;” and Mrs. Graham’s complacent smile made it evident of whom she was thinking.

“The blushing would probably be on the other side when you had been denounced as a thief and your proposition spurned, as was done by Arthur last night,” said Mr. Skinner, as he settled back in his chair.

“Do you mean that Arther has refused to accept our offer ?” inquired Mrs. Graham, anxiously.

“Yes’m,” replied Mr. Skinner, nodding his head knowingly.

“And did you tell him what I said I would do ?” demanded Mrs. Graham, fiercely.

“I did ; and it had about as much effect as pouring water on a duck’s back,” replied Mr. Skinner, with provoking indifference.

“I must see him and place the matter in its proper light, and then he will accept it quick enough,” replied Mrs. Graham, confidently.

"You are very rash to make the attempt," replied Mr. Skinner, "but I admire your spirit."

"Money is all he cares for," replied Mrs. Graham, contemptuously ; "and either you did not explain it to him properly or he suspicions our intentions to divide with him."

"I am afraid you will learn that there are some things that he cares more for than money, Mrs. Graham ; but you can try," replied Mr. Skinner, carelessly.

"If you go on in this strain, Mr. Skinner, I shall lose what little confidence I have had in you," said Mrs. Graham, imperiously. "I am surprised that you do not know that money is what we are all seeking for, in a more or less direct way, as the case may be, and Arthur is no exception. All his actions in opposing us have shown that money was the motive that urged him on. His first attempt was to defeat me in obtaining my award ; failing in that, to have it reduced. To tell me now that he would not accept the portion thus saved to Edith, would be to tell me something that no sane person would believe. Money is what he desires, and when his confidence is restored and he understands our offer he will be only too willing to accept it, and that, too, without questioning."

"Well, Mrs. Graham, there is no argument like stubborn facts," replied Mr. Skinner, wearily. "After you have tried it you will be able to decide if my judgment is correct."

"You will see," replied Mrs. Graham, complacently.

"In the meantime, what shall we do with the power of attorney ?" inquired Mr. Skinner.

"You must get it to Arthur as soon as possible," replied Mrs. Graham, earnestly; "it will help to make him feel more kindly and he will be that much more easily won."

"I will send it to him at once," said Mr. Skinner. "And when will you see him and obtain his consent?"

"I shall leave it for a while, as I must deal with this matter carefully," replied Mrs. Graham, as she arose to leave; "but you need have no fears on that score, for I will manage that."

"And what about his rent?"

"Not a word must be said about that until the other is settled," replied Mrs. Graham, quickly. "It might spoil all our plans to mention it now."

"I only wanted to know your opinion and what you desired me to do," replied Mr. Skinner, curtly.

"It will be time enough to arrange these matters when we have decided this other and more important one," replied Mrs. Graham; "and until that is decided I want nothing done to cause Arthur trouble or make him feel that we are not friendly."

"All right," replied Mr. Skinner; "I will send him the power of attorney at once and let all the other matters rest until I hear from you."

And, very much to his surprise, Arthur soon afterward received the coveted papers that gave him at least one point of advantage in his unequal contest with Mrs. Graham. His astonishment was in no way abated when he recalled his conversation with Mr. Skinner and the threats he had then made against him. These had made him abandon

all hope of ever getting possession of the papers, and it was not until after he had carefully examined them that he could believe them to be what he desired ; but finding that they were, he placed them where they would be secure, and began his work.

“I am going to visit your aunt Hattie, Edith ; would you like to go with me ?” said Arthur one evening when he returned home.

“What business takes you there ?” inquired Edith with some little surprise.

“I am going to see if I cannot get some explanation of her actions toward you, replied Arthur, determinedly. “I do not find it hard to understand why those whom we know but slightly, and even some close friends, avoid us, but aunt Hattie’s actions I cannot understand. She can hardly forget that her dead sister was your mother, and why she should so willingly believe the report of this woman I cannot comprehend. The least she could have done would have been to seek you and hear your defense. This would be the proper thing to do if she were only a friend, but how much more to be expected in one who bears this closer relationship. It seems strange that she could believe this woman’s falsehoods, even though she had much better proof than her unsupported word ; but still more so when I remember that at Mrs. Graham’s hands your aunt has never received favors or anything more than cold indifference, and I cannot understand why she should so willingly desert you and cling to her. To do so, she must stifle all feelings of kindred and be dead to all sense of justice, and I am going there to solve the mystery if I can.”

“I will go with you,” replied Edith, “for I have felt the loss of her friendship more than that of any one else. Since my mother’s death I have always gone to her for counsel and advice. No one has so nearly filled my mother’s place as she. I have always believed her to be my friend, and would not believe that she would turn against me, if by her actions she did not prove it.”

Fortunately they found aunt Hattie at home, and as they entered, Edith said : “We have not seen you for so long a time, auntie, that we thought we would call and find out the reason.”

“Yes, it has been some time since I have seen you, Edith,” replied aunt Hattie, whose manner betrayed no change of feeling toward her niece, “but I am getting old and find it is not so easy to get about as I did formerly ; but that need not have kept you from coming to see me.”

“If I had known that this was all that kept us apart I should certainly have been here long ago,” replied Edith, her old love quickly returning at the sight of her aunt.

“What else could there be, Edith ?” asked aunt Hattie, quietly.

“Well, I don’t know, I am sure,” replied Edith, doubtfully.

“What Edith means,” said Arthur, in explanation, “is that she feared your friendship was lost to her, for she was told that you said you did not care to see her again.”

“And who told you that, Edith ?” said aunt Hattie, with some little surprise.

“Mrs. Graham,” said Edith, in a low voice.

“I don’t think I ever said so,” replied aunt Hattie,

thoughtfully, "and I am sure I do not feel so ; for however much I may condemn your course, I cannot forget that you are my sister's child."

"I found it hard to believe ; but so many of our friends have deserted us that I feel sure of no one but Arthur, and your long silence seemed to confirm Mrs. Graham's words."

"I never believe in deserting a friend," replied aunt Hattie, gravely, "even though they sometimes do wrong."

"You speak of wrong-doing, auntie, as if I had wronged you," said Edith, quickly.

"Not me, Edith ; but I fear you have done wrong in trying to break your father's will," replied aunt Hattie, sadly. "Stewart Graham was one of the most just men I ever knew, and he gave you all that he thought was right ; and in respect to his memory you should have hesitated a long time before you publicly scandalized his name by showing your dissatisfaction with what he gave you."

"Why, aunt Hattie !" replied Edith in astonishment, "I have not tried to break father's will. Who told you that I had ?"

"It is not worth our while to quibble over the meaning of words, Edith," replied her aunt, gravely. "Your father's will should have been law to you, and it does seem that you were at least unwise to rush so hastily into court and attempt to obtain more than in his judgment you were entitled to."

"But I have not done this," said Edith, hastily. "I am and always have been perfectly satisfied with what the will gave me. I have never tried to obtain more than the will gave me, have I, Arthur ? Why don't you speak and



tell her I have not ?” and her eyes filled with tears as she realized the injustice of the accusation.

“May I ask if you speak of your own knowledge ?” said Arthur, as with an effort he controlled his indignation.

“It is true that I know this only by what I have heard,” replied aunt Hattie ; “but it has never been denied, so I believed it to be true.”

“Did you ever give Edith an opportunity to deny it ?” demanded Arthur.

“I have not seen Edith since I first heard it,” replied aunt Hattie, uneasily.

“And who first told you this story ?” inquired Arthur, earnestly.

“It is so long ago I cannot remember,” replied aunt Hattie, doubtfully ; “but it was either Mrs. Graham or uncle Webster, but I think it was Mrs. Graham.”

“And when she told you this did you not feel indignant that she should slander your niece in this manner ?” inquired Arthur, in astonishment, “and was not your first impulse to see Edith and know its truth ?”

“Yes, it was ; but why did Edith employ a lawyer ?” replied aunt Hattie, loth to admit her error.

“These are questions, aunt Hattie, that should have been asked before you condemned Edith. You heard what Mrs. Graham had to say, and without inquiring into its truth you condemn Edith and determine to keep from seeing her.”

“But Edith could have come to see me,” persisted aunt Hattie.

“Yes, and Mrs. Graham was smart enough to know it,

and so she informed Edith that you said you did not wish to see her again."

"But I did not say that," replied aunt Hattie, positively.

"O, it was not necessary that you should," replied Arthur; it did its work just as well, for all that."

"But you do not think that Mrs. Graham would tell what is not so, do you, Arthur?"

"I know she has done so several times already, and I have no doubt but that she will many times more," replied Arthur, bitterly. "Did you know that Mrs. Graham claims more than the will gave her?"

"I know she did claim the award," replied aunt Hattie, "but she did not feel certain that Stewart intended her to have it and so she gave it up, for she told me so."

"Aunt Hattie," said Arthur, earnestly, "can you conceive of a more defenseless position than that in which you have placed Edith by thinking and acting in this way? And is it not against all laws of justice or common sense to condemn Edith upon the statement of a person whom you now admit has done all that you charged Edith with doing, and has tried to get more than the will gave her?"

"But Edith did wrong in employing a lawyer," persisted aunt Hattie, "for that always means fight."

"Let us suppose a case," continued Arthur, who was now determined to know if aunt Hattie could be convinced, "and start with your admission that Mrs. Graham did claim more than was right; another person equally interested hears of it and is denied the privilege of investigation, would you condemn this person for employing a lawyer to investigate where she could not, and have him do all he could to prevent this wrong?"

"Well, I don't know much about law," replied aunt Hattie, uneasily, "but I know that when a lawyer enters a case trouble is sure to follow, and I am opposed to it. If I had been Edith I would have saved this expense and disgrace, for even if Mrs. Graham was disposed to, she could not harm Edith, for the law protects her, and Mrs. Graham could not change the law."

Arthur could not repress a smile of scorn as he noticed the vain attempt of aunt Hattie to justify her actions, and asked :

"Will you tell me why you credit Edith with more power than Mrs. Graham? for if Mrs. Graham could not change the law, why do you claim that Edith can? If the law protects Edith, why would it not protect Mrs. Graham?"

"All I know is, that Edith has been unfortunate in obtaining bad advice," replied aunt Hattie, positively; "and if she had not employed this lawyer there would have been no trouble."

"It is useless to talk on this matter any longer," replied Arthur, now thoroughly disheartened. "I have brought you a copy of the court records. This will furnish you with the facts in the case, and give you all the arguments that we care to show you. If you will read it, you will find that Edith has from the first defended, and is now defending, her father's will, while you will find that Mrs. Graham has not given up her award, but is fighting to maintain it. I should be pleased to hear what you have to say after you have read it."

Being assured that she would consider it, and trusting that in the quiet and seclusion of her home aunt Hattie

would at last arrive at a correct understanding, Arthur and Edith left her, only to have their hopes blasted by receiving the records a few days afterward, without a word of comment, while the real thief cried 'stop thief!' with renewed confidence.

"Have you noticed," began Mrs. Brandon, when the ladies were again gathered at the sewing society, "that of late Mrs. Graham has figured quite conspicuously in the courts?"

"I heard that the daughter had employed a lawyer and was making her considerable trouble," replied Mrs. Foreman, "but I know nothing more than this."

"We heard rumors of that some weeks ago," said Mrs. Gray, quietly, "but I have no knowledge of how true it is."

"You heard what Mrs. Graham said," replied Mrs. Adell, "and that confirmed it."

"I mean that I have no personal knowledge that it is true," replied Mrs. Gray.

"You have no reason to question Mrs. Graham's veracity," said Mrs. Adell, positively.

"What did Mrs. Graham say?" inquired Mrs. Rivers, with much apparent interest.

"As it can do no good," hastily interposed Mrs. Wallingford, "I don't think I would repeat it."

"Neither can it do harm," replied Mrs. Brandon; "for if Mrs. Graham has no objection to telling it, we certainly can have none."

"Did not Mrs. Graham request you to say as little as possible on this subject?" replied Mrs. Wallingford, inquiringly.

“O, she said she wanted it kept as quiet as possible,” replied Mrs. Brandon, laughing, “but we all understand what that means.”

“But do you think that Mrs. Graham would be pleased to know that you were informing others of this matter?” persisted Mrs. Wallingford.

“Why, Mrs. Wallingford, your innocence would provoke a smile were it not that I believe it to be assumed,” said Mrs. Adell. “You know as well as any of us that when Mrs. Graham came here and told us that Edith was trying to rob her of her share of the estate by breaking her father’s will, that she did it for the purpose of letting us know the facts in the case, so that we could judge Edith’s course correctly; and the more it is talked of the more it accomplishes her purpose.”

“And is Edith trying to break her father’s will?” inquired Mrs. Rivers, earnestly.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Brandon, “that is what Mrs. Graham tells us, and it is undoubtedly true.”

“Is it not unwise, Mrs. Brandon, to talk of Edith in this way?” inquired Mrs. Wallingford. “Even though she has done all that you charge her with, she is still entitled to protection from her friends; and as no good can come from circulating these reports, charity on our part should make us try to conceal them; and then if you should find that you had been mislead and that Edith had not done this, would you not have cause for regret?”

“O, you are too sentimental,” replied that lady, laughing. “After Edith has done all she could to rob Mrs. Graham, it comes with but poor grace to plead for sympathy.

"But if she has not done as you say, what then?" persisted Mrs. Wallingford.

"But there is no question of that, Mrs. Wallingford," interposed Mrs. Adell.

"There is not only a question of its truth, but I have the proof that it is false," replied Mrs. Wallingford, firmly. "This proof is so positive as to admit of no doubting, and should forever silence any farther questioning of Edith's actions."

"Do you mean that Mrs. Graham has told us what is not true?" inquired Mrs. Adell.

"I will tell you what I know, and where you can find the proofs of all I say," said Mrs. Wallingford, "and you can draw your own conclusions."

This gave promise of such rich developments that Mrs. Wallingford was quickly surrounded by eager listeners, among whom Mrs. Adell was not the least anxious to gather every word.

"After Mrs. Graham's visit to the society," continued Mrs. Wallingford, "you will remember that I made the suggestion that it was unjust to condemn Edith without first hearing what she had to say. Acting on this principle, I visited Edith, and she earnestly denied having any intention of breaking her father's will."

"O, but we could have told you that before you called," interposed Mrs. Brandon; "we knew she would do so from the first."

"Finding her denial so positive," continued Mrs. Wallingford, without noticing the interruption, "I had Mr. Wallingford search the records of the court in order that I

might decide justly between Mrs. Graham's statements and Edith's.

"And what did he find?" inquired Mrs. Brandon, earnestly.

"He found that what Edith said was true; and more than this, that the false charges she made against Edith were true of Mrs. Graham herself: that instead of Edith trying to rob her, she was endeavoring to take from Edith that which her father had willed should be hers. Now, you may prove these statements or not, just as you desire; but you should allow this slander against Edith to go no farther than it has. And to clear myself from any appearance of doing Mrs. Graham a wrong by repeating this, I will say that I have told her just what I have told you, and she has not denied it. Had she done so, or had she shown a disposition to check these untruthful stories, I should never have mentioned the matter to you; but I think you will agree with me now, that under these circumstances no one with a knowledge of the facts should again repeat this slander against Edith. If you would for a moment consider Edith as the daughter of either one of you, with both father and mother in their graves, and the woman who had taken your place in your husband's heart or home acting toward your child as Mrs. Graham is acting toward Edith, you would hesitate before you would aid her, and your mother heart would be pained at the sight of a Christian church being made the fortress of the oppressor, with all its power and influence turned against your innocent and uncomplaining child, until she is forced to give up even this source of comfort and sever the ties of memory that



center there as the place of worship of her father and mother. We claim to be Christians, let us prove it by our acts."

"The fact that Edith does not attend church is only a proof of her guilty conscience ; at least that is the way it appears to me," replied Mrs. Adell, with assumed indifference.

"That would be to assume that the innocent are always callous and unfeeling," replied Mrs. Wallingford, quietly.

"If Edith believes she has not done wrong, she could easily show her belief by facing an unjust opinion and living it down," replied Mrs. Brandon ; "and I agree with Mrs. Adell that it seems to be a proof of guilt that she does not do so."

"Some persons could do that, but others could not," replied Mrs. Bartley ; "in proof of which, we have only to watch the actions of those concerning whom a scandal is made public. Of these, you will find some who care but little, and outwardly show no signs of pain ; but generally you will find that it makes them seek the seclusion of their home until the matter is forgotten or they die of broken hearts. To assume that those who show no concern are innocent, would be an unjust conclusion against many sensitive souls whose innocence we cannot question ; and with all due respect to Mrs. Graham, I believe we have in her a fine example of one who, right or wrong, could face the world and defy its opinion ; and while I admire it when in the right, I cannot believe that those who have not this disposition are necessarily guilty."

"Well, I am not ready to believe that Mrs. Graham is

all in the wrong, and Edith the demure and saintly creature that she is painted," said Mrs. Adell, with some little asperity.

"I think the truth of the matter will be found to lie between the two extremes," said Mrs. Rivers, as she resumed her sewing.

"We should have some consideration for Mrs. Graham's desolate condition," said Mrs. Foreman, "and make some allowance for her actions."

"I have no desire to say what is unjust of Mrs. Graham," replied Mrs. Wallingford, "but I think you can readily recognize the justness of my defence of Edith."

"It strikes me that you are a little bit prejudiced in favor of your client," replied Mrs. Brandon, smiling, "but you make a splendid advocate for her cause. May I depend on your services to defend me, Mrs. Wallingford, if I am ever brought to judgment at the bar of public opinion?"

"If I know you to be unjustly accused, you certainly can," replied that lady, quietly, as she gathered her sewing together preparatory to taking her leave.

"I admire her more and more," began Mrs. Gray, when Mrs. Wallingford was out of hearing; "she is so practical and common sensed."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Adell, with a toss of her head, "but terribly prejudiced against Mrs. Graham."

"Then you do not believe all she says about the court records?" said Mrs. Gray, inquiringly.

"O, some of it is no doubt true," replied Mrs. Adell; "but when Mr. Wallingford searched the records it was for the purpose of finding Mrs. Graham guilty, and of course he only found what he desired."

“O, dear,” said Mrs. Gray, despairingly, “I am all in doubt again. First I believed Mrs. Graham, then Mrs. Wallingford convinced me that Edith was right, and now I don’t know what to think.”

“That is because you believe every story you hear,” said Mrs. Adell, laughing; “but Mrs. Wallingford’s arguments have not changed my opinions in the least.”

“It may be that Mrs. Rivers was right when she suggested that the truth lies between the two extremes,” said Mrs. Gray, doubtfully.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FAR FROM BEING WORLDLY WISE.

Arthur had now made his arrangements to visit his uncle Ralph, and as he desired to leave all his business in order, he sought Mrs. Graham that he might give her the money he had collected. The servant ushered him into the parlor, and when Mrs. Graham made her appearance, Arthur wasted no time in formalities, but proceeded at once with the business in hand.

“As I am going out of the city,” began Arthur, “I thought best to settle with you for the rents I have collected.”

“Money is always acceptable, Arthur,” replied Mrs. Graham, pleasantly. “But what calls you away so suddenly?”

“I am going to visit uncle Ralph,” replied Arthur. “But unfortunately I have not much money for you this time, as the bills for repairs have taken nearly all I have collected.”

“Repairs!” exclaimed Mrs. Graham, her brow contracting with displeasure; “and what authority have you to make repairs?”

“I don’t really know that I have any, except what the power of attorney gives me,” replied Arthur, doubtfully.

“But the city authorities gave me notice to put in a new sidewalk, and as heretofore I have always made all necessary repairs, I had no idea that you would object to it now.”

“But that, sir, was never for so large an amount as this,” replied Mrs. Graham, surveying the figures on the bill.

“But the repairs were needed ; you must admit that,” said Arthur, confidently, “and the price is reasonable, is it not ?”

“It is true that I have allowed you to make some repairs and bring me the bills in place of the money ; but I will not allow you to assume my duties to this extent,” replied Mrs. Graham, indignantly.

“But, Mrs. Graham, I am at a loss to understand why you object,” replied Arthur ; “for if I had not done this you would have had to do it ; and if the repairs had not been made soon, the city would have put in the sidewalk and taxed you more than double what it costs now, and I cannot see what you would gain.”

“You are simply my servant in this matter,” said Mrs. Graham, contemptuously, “and I do not care to argue the question with you ; but you might as well understand now as at any other time that I am the only one who has the power to attend to these matters.”

“Then you will not accept these bills instead of money ?” inquired Arthur.

“No, not until I see my attorney and hear what he has to say,” replied Mrs. Graham, bluntly.

“I am very sorry that you have decided upon this course,” said Arthur, “for the reason that I would like to have this business settled before I leave.”

"I will take the money," replied Mrs. Graham, condescendingly, "and you can hold the bills until I decide."

"O, no ; that is not my way of doing business," replied Arthur, determinedly ; "you must take all or none."

"Do you refuse to deliver this money to me ?" demanded Mrs. Graham, excitedly.

"Unless you accept these bills, I do," replied Arthur, firmly.

"I shall see my attorney about this matter," replied Mrs. Graham, in a threatening manner," and you will hear from me again."

"In that case," replied Arthur, coolly, "I will bid you good day."

Mrs. Graham felt disconcerted at Arthur's firmness, and looked as if she would willingly recall her decision ; but Arthur gave her no opportunity to again refer to the subject, and her pride prevented her from making any advances, and when the door closed upon his retreating form she was in no pleasant frame of mind ; but one thing she had determined upon : she would write to uncle Ralph and inform him of Arthur's intended visit, for the purpose of poisoning their minds, and advise them to beware of his plausible words. This done, she started for Mr. Skinner's, to seek consolation and advice.

"I am afraid I have been unwise in allowing Arthur to collect these rents," began Mrs. Graham, as she seated herself near Mr. Skinner.

"How so ?" inquired Mr. Skinner, in surprise.

"He has made some very expensive repairs, and now demands that the estate pay for them. I declined to accept

the bills, and he refused to pay me the money unless I accepted both."

"What repairs did he make?" inquired Mr. Skinner.

"The principal item was for a new sidewalk. I heard of it some days ago from Mr. Fletcher, who keeps watch of how Arthur is acting."

"Were the repairs necessary?" inquired Mr. Skinner.

"O, I don't object to the repairs, or the price; but I do not propose to let him act as if he had the right to do this without first asking my consent," replied Mrs. Graham, determinedly.

"He has made the repairs and paid for them, has he not?" said Mr. Skinner, inquiringly.

"He has."

"And they were necessary and the price reasonable?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Graham, a little in doubt as to Mr. Skinner's intentions.

"Well, Mrs. Graham, it puzzles me to know exactly what you desire. You cannot expect that he will pay for these repairs out of his own pocket, and he would not do it if you did, and I doubt very much if you could force him to; for he has been allowed to do this before, and you have but recently given him the authority to continue doing so, and until you revoke that power he is authorized to do just what you are objecting to; and even if you had the power to prevent him, it would be unwise to use it at the present time, when you are hoping to reconcile him toward your scheme."

"But if what you say is true, I have no authority at all," replied Mrs. Graham, in an injured tone.



“Not until you revoke his,” replied Mr. Skinner. “But the business is handled well, gives you no trouble, and should continue just as it is. Your personal pleasure in seeing him bow before you should be deferred until you have decided this other matter, or you feel that you can do without him ; for Arthur is not easily trod upon, you know that.”

“But I have told him that I would not consent ; how can I get over that ?” inquired Mrs. Graham.

“I would advise you to tell him that this time you will accept these bills, but that hereafter he must first ask your consent before he pays any bills or contracts for any repairs.”

“That is what I want,” replied Mrs. Graham, evidently relieved at this solution of the embarrassing position she had placed herself in. “So long as he has to acknowledge my authority I will be satisfied.”

“Mr. Blood, what can I do when a woman refuses to accept my money ?” said Arthur, as he abruptly broke in upon the reveries of the attorney.

“Well, Arthur, that is so rare a case as to require some thought,” smilingly replied Mr. Blood.

“Well, the facts are simply these,” continued Arthur : “Mrs. Graham tried to collect the rents and failed. She then gave me the authority to collect them and attend to all the business, just as I had formerly been doing. The city served me with notice to put in a new sidewalk. I did so, and presented the bill to her, and she positively refused to accept it in place of the money I had collected, and claimed that I had no authority to make repairs. She then proposed that I pay her what money I had and hold

the bills until she consulted her lawyer. This I refused to do ; was I right ?”

“ Have you been giving Mrs. Graham all the money you have collected ?” inquired Mr. Blood, earnestly.

“ Yes ; why ?” said Arthur inquiringly.

“ And Edith has received no part of it ?”

“ No, sir ; not a cent.

“ That is not right, Arthur, and hereafter you must give Edith all that you collect. Keep a close account of it, and when Mrs. Graham asks you for it you tell her that you have paid it to the proper person and hold her receipt.”

“ But can I do this ?” inquired Arthur, eagerly.

“ Certainly you can.”

“ And Mrs. Graham cannot prevent it ?”

“ Not in the least.”

“ Well,” said Arthur, in astonishment, “ I guess Mrs. Graham made a mistake when she refused to accept the bills. And, Mr. Blood, can I pay my store rent in the same way ?”

“ Certainly, Arthur ; but I thought Mr. Graham gave you your store rent free.”

“ So he did ; but Mrs. Graham made up her mind that she wanted five hundred dollars a month for it, and I thought she was asking at least its full value,” replied Arthur, smiling.

“ She was trying to make your position too warm for your comfort, that was all,” replied Mr. Blood. “ But if you keep up this quiet but firm resistance, she will come to time before long.”

“ She has, somewhat, already,” quickly replied Arthur,

“for her lawyer conceived a fine scheme by which the relatives were to be robbed of nearly all that belonged to them, while Mrs. Graham and Edith were to share equally in the plunder—”

“And you spoiled their scheme by failing to consent,” interrupted Mr. Blood, as he leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily at Arthur’s look of amazement.

“How did you find that out?” demanded Arthur.

“O, Skinner came to me before he saw you and told me the whole scheme. He was very enthusiastic, and felt certain that he had found a remedy for all the trouble. I did not relish the prospect of losing a good paying case, and when he asked me what I thought of it, I told him that he must first obtain your consent and then I would consider it. Several days passed and I had almost forgotten it, when one evening I saw my client in the company of the opposing counsel, and to all appearances on the best of terms with him. Aha! thought I, so Arthur has consented, and Skinner has stolen a march on me. But I kept a close watch upon you two conspirators”—and Mr. Blood’s eyes twinkled merrily—“until I was nearly tired out, when, to my surprise, you jumped up, and as I thought prepared to strike him. You might as well have done so as far as he was concerned, for as I slowly approached him I could see that you had spoiled his plans and left him entirely disheartened, so I sat down and tried to cheer him up.”

“Yes, I have no doubt you helped matters,” replied Arthur, laughing—“very much after the pattern of Job’s comforters.”

“Well, he informed me that he had told you of Mrs.

Graham's full assent having been obtained, and how you seemed willing to acquiesce until the very last moment, and then knocked it all to pieces by positively refusing to join them."

"He was very foolish to talk like that about Mrs. Graham," said Arthur, in surprise; "but what puzzles me is that she should find it necessary to have me join her."

"She begins to fear you, Arthur," said Mr. Blood, "and sees that her plans must fail if you oppose her; and now if you refuse to pay her what you collect, she will weep more genuine tears than she ever has over her husband's death. But you must be constantly on your guard, for those you consider your friends are also hers, and ready to carry news to her of all you say and do. What you tell me concerning her refusal to accept of those repairs does not surprise me, for one day as I was riding by your store I saw two gentlemen on the opposite side of the car who seemed to be greatly interested in something that was taking place there, and presently one of them said, 'Aha! a new sidewalk in front of Arthur Howard's; I warrant he expects the estate to pay for it.' And now, when you tell me that Mrs. Graham declines to accept the bills for repairs, I feel sure that it is upon the advice of these men. This is only one instance, 'tis true, but it should serve to make you watchful."

"I have been aware of this for some time," replied Arthur, "and it is partly for the purpose of unraveling a mystery in regard to my uncle Ralph's family that I intend to go to them in a few days and tell them the true condition of affairs, so that we may decide what is best to do."

"That is Ralph Gerald, is it not?" inquired Mr. Blood.

"Yes, sir; my mother's brother," replied Arthur.

"You can accomplish but little with them," said Mr. Blood, "they are prejudiced against you, and I am afraid your journey will be useless. The way I know of this is, that some time ago I received a letter from my sister, who lives near them, and in it she stated that your cousin Florence had told her that Edith was trying to rob them of their share, and if she succeeded they would get nothing."

"It is an outrage," said Arthur, indignantly, "that Edith should be not only subjected to the annoyance that Mrs. Graham causes her, but that these relatives, for whose protection we are doing all we can, should thus slander her; but when I tell them a few facts their eyes will open to the truth and they will see their mistake."

"Don't be too sanguine, Arthur," said Mr. Blood, quietly, "for that courts disappointment. I fear that they are very far from being worldly wise."

"What do you mean by 'worldly wise'?" queried Arthur.

"O, I mean that they are country folks and not acquainted with city ways and the sharp practices that we who live in the cities so well understand."

"Then the cities are the world?" interposed Arthur.

"Yes, in that sense I suppose they are," said Mr. Blood, with a smile. "But it is not to their discredit that they should not be ever on the alert to detect fraud and dissimulation as we who live in cities must be. In fact, I rather admire the blissful ignorance of a farmer's life when I compare it with the distrust and suspicion that we meet with in our cities."

"No one would find fault with your taste if he had Mrs.

Graham in mind as a fitting representative of those who are worldly wise," said Arthur.

"I am afraid you do not show Mrs. Graham the proper amount of filial love," said Mr. Blood, with mock seriousness.

"No, I may not," said Arthur, carelessly. "But I want to take issue with you on a point that you have just advanced, which is, that a farmer's life is one that makes him more blissfully ignorant and susceptible than his sharp and all wise city brother."

"But such is the case, Arthur. I do not wish to be understood as saying that they are not naturally as bright and intelligent as the average person we meet in our cities, but their surroundings are such that they quickly drift into that condition of mind where everything seems true to them as is nature in all her dealings. They are not to blame for this, and I do not know that it is to their discredit; in fact, as it looks to me now, I think I rather like it."

"But I contend that this is not the case," persisted Arthur.

"It has been universally conceded—until now," said Mr. Blood, with a quizzical smile, as he inquiringly looked at Arthur.

"But that don't prove it to be true," was the quick reply.

"No. But if you demand the proof, I can cite you thousands of cases where these country folks come to our cities and are duped and robbed by city sharpers."

"That may all be, but that is only proving that they are not acquainted with us as thieves. Come, Mr. Blood, that

is no argument in favor of the statement that those who live in cities are allwise and proof against delusions, while those who do not are most easily deluded."

"Well, take any one of the gamins that run wild in our streets, and let him take a green farmer's boy in tow, and how long before he would have him believing the most absurd things, regardless of their truth or sense?"

"And that same boy," said Arthur, quickly, "could take this city gamin to his home and make him believe that sparrows are hawks or that robins are birds of paradise; but that would only prove that each was unacquainted with the surroundings and life of the other. The rugged frontiersman could take the sharpest financier or merchant that we have, and show him more of nature than he ever dreamed of knowing, and yet that merchant or financier could tell him more than he ever knew of stocks and bonds, their rise and fall, and it would prove no more than the cases you have mentioned. But let that merchant or any other man say aught against his friend, and he would not be believed so readily as is Mrs. Graham, when among these worldly-wise men and women of this great city she circulates these false and cruel statements. O, no, Mr. Blood, the fact that we live in city or country does not make us proof against the slanderer's tongue."

"But my sister writes me that your uncle's family have such great faith in uncle Webster that they will listen to neither reason nor argument."

"The same thing is true of Edith's aunt Hattie," replied Arthur, bitterly, "and she lives in the city. But if I go all



that distance to see them they certainly will not refuse to hear what I have to say."

"They may not ; but don't be disappointed if they do," was Mr. Blood's warning, as Arthur disappeared.

Tired and travel-stained, Arthur at last reached his uncle Ralph's, and Mr. Blood's words instantly came to his mind as his eyes detected the stealthy glances that passed between the members of the household, and gave him warning that his task would be neither pleasant nor easy of accomplishment. But Arthur was not to be repulsed by any slight difficulty, and manfully determined to overcome their prejudices if it were possible.

"We have been expecting you for several days," began his cousin Florence, as she and his aunt Lucy seated themselves on the opposite side of the dingy little parlor whose inhospitable portals were but seldom thrown open to welcome the visiting guest.

"And how did you know that I was coming ?" inquired Arthur.

"Mrs. Graham wrote us that—"

Her mother's warning gesture and contracted brow stopped her further reply, while an awkward silence settled slowly down upon them all.

"Where is uncle Ralph ?" inquired Arthur at last, in hopes of breaking the silence.

"He has gone to the village," replied Mrs. Gerald, who now assumed charge of the conversation.

"And cousin Tom, where is he ?"

"He's outside, somewhere," answered that lady, curtly.

Whether it was the damp, cold air of the room, or the icy

coolness of his reception, Arthur could not tell, but he shivered perceptibly and felt chilled through and through.

Mrs. Gerald noticed this, and asked : " Would you like to have us build you a fire, Arthur ? "

" Suit yourselves in regard to that," replied Arthur, uncertain as to the kindliness of intention that prompted the suggestion ; " I shall stay but a short time."

" Florence, you might build a fire, it does seem a little cool in here," and Mrs. Gerald drew her cape more closely about her shoulders.

As Florence left the room, Arthur determined he would make short work of his mission and be gone ; so turning to Mrs. Gerald, he said :

" I suppose you know my purpose in coming ? "

" Yes, I understood you were to be out this way visiting and would probably call on us," replied Mrs. Gerald. " How did you leave Edith ? "

" I left her quite well," replied Arthur, a little taken aback by the abruptness of her question.

" And how is uncle Webster ? "

" He is quite well, I believe."

" He must be getting quite well along in years, and I feared he might not be quite as strong as formerly," said Mrs. Gerald, feeling more secure now that the conversation had been turned in this direction.

" He shows his age considerably," replied Arthur, earnestly, " and is not the vigorous man you remember so many years ago. He has gotten well into his second childhood and is easily influenced."

" How is Mrs. Graham ? " hastily inquired Mrs. Gerald, as Florence returned to the room.

"She seems to be prospering," replied Arthur, "and if her prosperity continues, uncle Ralph's family can expect but very little from the estate."

"O, I must attend to the dinner," said Mrs. Gerald, hastily rising and leaving the room.

Florence had been bending down trying to induce the unruly stove to do its duty, and when her mother passed from the room she asked, while her up-turned face showed her anxiety: "And do you understand these court matters?"

"Yes," replied Arthur, "and I will tell you all about it if I can get half a chance."

"Florence!"

And Mrs. Gerald's shrill voice sounded throughout the room.

"I want you in the kitchen," said Mrs. Gerald, who now appeared at the door, while her face indicated her fear that she might have been out-generaled.

"I am afraid the fire will not burn," said Florence, demurely, as she reluctantly left the room.

"Well," thought Arthur, "this is the most uncivil treatment I ever heard of, but I will see it through; it is no gentle hint to leave, but I shall not be too sensitive."

"You must excuse us, Arthur," began Mrs. Gerald, as she returned to the room, "we are doing our own work and cannot spare as much time to entertain company as we wish we could."

"I appreciate the circumstances," replied Arthur, "but I will not detain you long if you will only listen to what I have to say."

"We have no desire to talk on that subject," replied Mrs. Gerald, decisively.

"But it is of interest to you as well as Florence," said Arthur, looking appealingly at his cousin, who had again returned to the room and was apparently greatly interested in the progress of the fire.

"We have no interest in the matter in any way," said Mrs. Gerald, firmly.

"But you are mentioned in the will," persisted Arthur.

"That makes no difference," replied Mrs. Gerald, provoked at Arthur's persistence; "we do not feel enough interest in the matter to waste our time in discussing it."

"Will you decline to take your portion?" inquired Arthur, pointedly.

"Whatever belongs to us we will trust to the Lord to bring to us," replied Mrs. Gerald, resignedly, "but we will not seek for it."

"A woman eminently suited to Mrs. Graham's purposes," thought Arthur.

"But if you knew that you would get nothing unless you demanded it, what then?"

"I have told you that we do not care to discuss it," replied Mrs. Gerald, curtly. "We are not wholly selfish and with no other thoughts than to possess that which does not rightfully belong to us. We have no desire and no interest in this matter in any way."

"But you have interest enough in the matter to wrongly accuse my wife of attempting to rob you," said Arthur, indignantly, "and you feel very bitterly toward her because you think she has done this; and after Florence has charged

my wife with trying to rob you, it is not right for you to decline to hear what she has to say in defence. If you would only hear me, I could tell you where you can find the proof that Edith has defended your interests as well as her own, and is willing to continue to do so. In fact, she could not help but do this, even if she desired. I can prove to you that Mrs. Graham not only intends to rob you, as she has already done, but that she made me a proposition to rob you of thousands of dollars and divide with Edith. Your faith in uncle Webster is sadly misplaced. He is honest in purpose, and intends to do right ; but Mrs. Graham has him completely under her control, and he knows no will but hers. If, as you say, you have no interest in this matter, will you not be just to Edith, and at least believe that she has done you no harm, until you have some better proof than Mrs. Graham's statements?"

"We do not care to talk of the matter," replied Mrs. Gerald, doggedly ; "it is not worth our while."

"Then I shall leave you," said Arthur, indignant at the treatment he had received ; "and in after years, if you find that you get little or nothing in place of the thousands that are justly yours, do not censure Edith, for she has been watchful of your interests, and her kindest endeavors you meet by sullen silence. Your apparent indifference does not deceive me, for your anger at Edith for what you believe she has done shows only too plainly that you are not only interested, but anxious to obtain all that is yours. You are blinded by prejudice now ; but some day your eyes may be opened, not only to the injustice of your charges against my wife, but to the terrible mistake you are now making."

Arthur was inclined to take his defeat philosophically, though he felt his disappointment keenly ; and as he traveled homeward, his thoughts often returned to his queer experience.

“Mr. Blood spoke truly when he said that they were prejudiced against us and would not listen to reason,” thought Arthur. “I know it now, but I could hardly have believed the density of their ignorance without having had this experience. The time must come when they will see that we desired to help them, and save them from being robbed by Mrs. Graham, but they are far too stubborn to ever admit its truth.”

## CHAPTER XX.

“HELL HATH NO FURY LIKE A WOMAN SCORNE.”

On his arrival home, Arthur had but little to say of his visit to his uncle Ralph's; and after recounting the main points of interest, he dropped the subject and tried to blot it from his memory.

Mrs. Graham had evidently kept a close watch upon his movements, for only a short time after his return he received word from her that she wished him to call, as she desired to talk with him.

“I may as well go at one time as another,” thought Arthur; and so, soon after receiving her note, he was ushered into her residence, where, seating himself, he awaited her appearance.

“Well, Arthur, I trust you had a pleasant and profitable journey,” said Mrs. Graham, pleasantly, as she entered the room where he was sitting.

“Pleasant and profitable, I may say, in all respects except where your handiwork showed itself too prominently,” replied Arthur, looking fixedly at her.

“You see,” continued Mrs. Graham, exultingly, “I heard something of your visit before I had the pleasure of seeing you.”



"I am not at all surprised at that," gravely replied Arthur.

"Then I judge we begin to understand each other," said Mrs. Graham, carefully watching the expression of his face.

"For myself, yes," replied Arthur, calmly meeting her searching eyes; "how is it on your part?"

"At times I think I fully understand you," said Mrs. Graham, almost mournfully, "I know your every motive and desire; and then again, Arthur, you puzzle me exceedingly."

"And in what way do I puzzle you?" inquired Arthur, a little surprised at her concession

"In not always following the line of action that pays you best, and is also the easiest," replied Mrs. Graham, slowly, and with low, musical intonations. "There was a time when I counted you as one of my most trusted friends; when I would have risked my all for your safety and protection. Those were pleasant days to me, Arthur, and the memory of them is not unpleasant even now; but between those memories and our feelings now, a dark chasm seems to open, in which I see the mangled and distorted forms of all that makes life enjoyable and friendship lasting; and when I look into its horrible depths my eyes seem to deceive me, and I struggle to arouse myself as if from some horrible dream. But no! the realization that it is only too true is more horrible than the dream itself. I have tried to find the secret by which this change has taken place, only to be more and more perplexed by probing for it. I could easily believe that it is I that have changed, were it

not that I find I cannot willingly lose your friendship without an effort to restore it and renew the pleasant times once more. And, Arthur, if by any act of mine I have caused this change in your feelings toward me, you should prove your friendship by believing me when I say that I have always desired to be your friend, and only when you have made me desperate have I consented to try to force you to again be friendly. You do not need me to tell you that if you had remained so it would have been easier for you, and in many ways you would have been better off. And it is with the certainty in my mind that you recognize this, and see your friends and relatives leaving you, that you have even felt the necessity of leaving your church because it became unbearable to you, that you have had to bear the expense of all this litigation, that you even risk the loss of everything worth keeping, when you might, if so disposed, exchange all this for happiness, wealth and friends—this is what surprises me. It cannot be explained by stubbornness; for even that would yield to a pressure so great as this. Can you explain why you persist in this course? for I admit that I was never so mistaken in a person in all my life as I have been in you.”

“If you thought, Mrs. Graham, as I believe you have, that I had implicit confidence in you and was ready and willing to follow your commands, I am not surprised to hear you say that now you find yourself mistaken. There was a time when this might have been—when I was completely in your power, ready to wear the harness that sat so lightly and pleasantly upon me that I did not realize its presence; but that letter you wrote me concerning the

trouble between Bertha and I, taught me a lesson, and I have learned much—aye, too much, since then.”

“Did Mr. Graham know of that letter?” inquired Mrs. Graham, anxiously.

“Yes, he knew its full contents,” replied Arthur, quietly. “I handed it to him to read, and never more regretted an act than I did that; for when I saw what the true condition was, I wished that my eyes could have been opened to your true character in some other way.”

“It was a very foolish proceeding,” said Mrs. Graham, flushing slightly; “but, Arthur, that is past and gone. My question, why you still persist in disregarding your own interests, remains unanswered.”

“It is very easily explained,” replied Arthur. “I believe that I am in the right.”

“Right or wrong has nothing to do with it, Arthur,” said Mrs. Graham, hastily. “You are losing everything you have and everything you can hope for, and right or wrong make but a poor showing against such a loss.”

“You will please allow me the right to choose,” said Arthur, quietly.

“Certainly,” replied Mrs. Graham, graciously. “But I desired to be sure that you fully understood the situation, and if possible that we might agree and both be benefited thereby.”

“On that subject I supposed I had given your lawyer a sufficiently positive answer,” replied Arthur, curtly, aggravated that this subject should again be brought to his attention.

“Yes, but that was before these relatives had treated

you so cavalierly," persisted Mrs. Graham. "You then believed them to be your friends; now you know where they stand. They have insulted you and spurned your kindest offers. You have done your duty, and if they choose to act in this way you certainly have no reason to feel that you should further protect them."

"When I denounced this scheme as one of robbery," said Arthur, with flashing eyes, "I did so because it was nothing else; and though these relatives whom I sought to protect, insulted me and spurned my offers, that does not change the fact. I believed it then, and I believe it now. I trust, Mrs. Graham, that I have made myself so thoroughly understood that you will never dare to mention this subject to me again; if so, let us change the subject. Why did you send for me?"

"I confess I cannot understand you," said Mrs. Graham, resignedly, as she realized that she had made no impression upon Arthur.

"Is that all you desired to say to me?" inquired Arthur, provoked at her persistence.

"No," said Mrs. Graham, slowly, as if she found it hard to take her mind from off the more important subject. "No, I sent for you to tell you that after consulting with Mr. Skinner, we have decided that for this time we will accept the bills for repairs instead of the money, but in future we shall decline to do so."

"As I understand you, then," said Arthur, slowly, "you have decided to recede from your former position, and will now accept the bills for repairs."

"Yes, that is the decision," replied Mrs. Graham, a little

nettled at Arthur's way of putting it, "but for this time only."

"Well," said Arthur, with evident satisfaction, "upon a consultation with my attorney, we have decided to pay you neither bills nor money from this time forth."

"Do you mean to say that you decline to pay me the money you have collected?" demanded Mrs. Graham, her face flushed with passion.

"Well, you see," replied Arthur, apparently unconcerned, "when you go fishing for legal opinions you can never tell just what you will catch. I asked my attorney how I could force you to take the bills as well as the money, and his reply was that I had no business to give you either, and that I must do so no longer. And the queerest part of it is, that I would never have known the law was so strange were it not for your bringing up the question; but now that I have found it to be so, it suits me exactly, and I trust that it suits you." And as he waited for her reply, a smile played about his countenance that showed that he felt that for once, at least, he was the victor.

"I am sorry that you have arrived at this decision, Arthur," said Mrs. Graham, as she leaned back in her chair and narrowly surveyed him. "It is certain to cause you trouble, though of the outcome I have no doubt."

"And do you intend to oppose the law?" inquired Arthur, in mock alarm. "It is not I that you would be fighting, but the law."

"I cannot say, now," replied Mrs. Graham, cautiously; "I must see Mr. Skinner before I decide."

"I suppose that I will hear what your decision is?" said Arthur, inquiringly, as he arose to take his leave.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Graham, decisively, “you will hear from me in due time.”

Mrs. Graham’s face plainly showed her perplexity as she hastily entered Mr. Skinner’s office and inquired :

“What course should I pursue, Mr. Skinner, if Arthur should fail to pay this money he has collected ?”

“O, I think a pretty sharp demand from me would bring him to time,” replied Mr. Skinner, carelessly.

“Well, then, I want you to demand it from him at once, and in terms that he cannot misunderstand,” said Mrs. Graham.

“Is he behind in his payments ?”

“Yes, not only that, but he refuses to pay at all.”

“What is that ?” said Mr. Skinner, turning quickly toward her.

“I say that he has not paid me a dollar of all the money he has collected since he received this power of attorney, as you call it, and now repudiates my claim to it,” replied Mrs. Graham, excitedly.

“That is a different matter entirely,” said Mr. Skinner, thoughtfully. “If he knows his rights we must deal differently with him. Let me see. You say he said you had no right to receive these rents, what else did he say ?”

“He said he asked Mr. Blood how he could force me to take the bills as well as the money, who replied that he should never have paid me either one, and to do so no longer.”

“This is bad business,” said Mr. Skinner thoughtfully, “very bad.”

“I regret that we gave him the power of attorney,” said

Mrs. Graham, sadly; "it has been the cause of all this trouble."

"Not entirely," replied Mr. Skinner, thoughtfully, "for if you had not been so anxious to have Arthur bow down and acknowledge your power, he would not have found it necessary to seek advice from Mr. Blood. That was the main cause of the trouble; and it is not good policy to place the error where it does not rightfully belong; it is apt to lead to a wrong decision in trying to overcome the difficulty."

"But if I had collected these rents myself, and not given him this power of attorney, this question could never have arisen," persisted Mrs. Graham.

"Yes, but that is no more an explanation of its cause than to say that if the child had never been born the man could never have committed murder; and though it is necessary that the murderer should be born before he can commit murder, it does not follow that this was the cause why the murder was committed," replied Mr. Skinner, with a malicious smile.

"I am not in the mood to discuss fine points of law, or listen to plausible theories on abstract conditions of matter," replied Mrs. Graham, angrily. "What I want is that you shall force Arthur to pay this money, and that, too, at once."

"I was only getting even with you for the remark you made recently that there were some women who would put us lawyers to the blush," replied Mr. Skinner with evident satisfaction. "But now, in regard to forcing Arthur to pay you this money, I have my doubts if we can do it."



“But you said a moment ago that all you had to do was to demand it and he would pay it at once,” said Mrs. Graham, with a sneer.

“Yes, Mrs. Graham, but I did not know then that he knew his rights.”

“What rights?” demanded Mrs. Graham. “You seem to forget that I am the executrix of this estate and he is not.”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Skinner, “that is all very true; but the daughter has a right to her share of the rents and you cannot deprive her of it. I was afraid this might be the result when you told me of your refusal to accept the bills for repairs, and it has lost us more than you can easily realize, and all because of your insane desire to have Arthur acknowledge your power. He has defeated you at your own game, and that, too, on the ground of your own choosing. Do you realize the extent of your loss; do you see that he no longer need fear your demands for rent; that he has now the very sinews of war that we desired to keep from him?”

Mrs. Graham’s first impulse was to resent this severe castigation that Mr. Skinner gave her with so prodigal a hand, but a sense of her dependence upon him made her cautious in her reply. She could not afford to quarrel with him, and yet the humiliating position in which she was placed was keenly felt by her, as she replied :

“But he will have to account for all he has collected in the final settlement, will he not?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Skinner, with a sneer, “but that is poor consolation now; you will have to do the same; but

if he could get no part of it until that time, it would be a very different matter."

"This is only idle talk," said Mrs. Graham, petulantly. "I came for advice as to what to do, and not to have you read me a homily upon my indiscretions."

"We have only one hope," replied Mr. Skinner, "and that one gives but little promise of success."

"And what is that?" inquired Mrs. Graham, eagerly.

"That is to have Webster Graham send Arthur a very carefully written letter, and request him to pay this money. By so doing we may induce him to pay it rather than have trouble. It will not do to threaten him outright; but a little care in writing the letter will convey the intelligence, and if he is not fully informed of the strength of his position, he may give in. You had better write the letter yourself, and send it to Mr. Graham, so that he can copy it and send it to Arthur. This is the only chance we have, and it must be handled delicately; but you understand that as well as I. And if it is handled properly, we may regain the advantage that your foolish actions have lost us."

"I shall write to Webster at once," replied Mrs. Graham, rising to leave.

"Have you spoken to Arthur of that other matter?" inquired Mr. Skinner.

"Yes, but he has not decided to accept it yet," replied Mrs. Graham, edging her way uncomfortably toward the door.

"He has not declined, has he?" inquired Mr. Skinner, determined to know the truth.

“Why do you ask?” inquired Mrs. Graham, curtly.

“Because you promised to tell me how you succeeded.”

“But I did not promise to tell you beforehand, did I?” inquired Mrs. Graham, with a quizzical look at her questioner.

“No, that is true.”

“Well, I shall let you know the very moment he accepts,” said Mrs. Graham, with a slight tinge of sarcasm in her voice, “so that your suspense may be ended.”

“If he thinks I am going to give him another opportunity to scourge me, he is mistaken,” said Mrs. Graham, half aloud, as she made her way home. “I have to sink all sense of self-respect as it is, and yet I cannot do without him. The idea of Stewart Graham’s widow being brow-beaten and insulted in this manner by her own attorney!” and Mrs. Graham’s cup seemed filled with wormwood and gall, as she ground her teeth with impotent rage. “And Arthur, he for whom I have done so much, and to whom I have been so kind, is now, no doubt, exulting over his victory. If I had him here I could strangle him!” And her clenched hands and rigid muscles gave but a slight indication of her horrible thoughts. Could one have removed the heavy veil that covered her face from the world, they would, no doubt, have been horrified by the picture of inhuman fiendishness there portrayed. But Arthur was beyond her grasp, and her dependence upon Mr. Skinner made it impossible for her to wreak her vengeance upon him; and so, like a human tigress, she mechanically moved along the streets of that great city, unconsciously following the path to her home. Tears would have been a relief, but

they refused their consolation. Her feelings were too intense, her hatred too all absorbing, to give place to tears. Could she but vent her feelings upon some object of her hatred, she would more easily have controlled them. But no, there was no one near. And without seeming to feel the exertion, she at last accomplished the task of walking to her home. As she entered, Bertha noticed her fearful paleness, which, with the intense fire that gleamed in her eyes, made her fearful that Mrs. Graham was seriously ill.

“Why, Mrs. Graham, what is the matter?” anxiously inquired Bertha, as she caught a sight of her face. “Are you ill?”

“Stop your idiotic chattering!” said Mrs. Graham, as her features moved mechanically.

“Can’t I help you in some way?” inquired Bertha, alarmed at her condition.

“No, get out of the room—leave me—your presence is hateful to my sight!”

Bertha stood irresolute a moment, but the sight of her old friend’s condition fixed her resolve, and she stepped forward, saying, “Let me help you remove your wrappings, Mrs. Graham.”

Bertha’s touch upon her arm was the spark that was needed to rouse her to action, and violently flinging her off, Mrs. Graham sprang at one bound into the center of the room, her flushed face and flashing eyes unmistakably showing her fury.

“Keep your hands off of me!” said Mrs. Graham, fiercely—“don’t you dare to touch me again! I will be minded in my own house, even though I am scorned and

insulted by the world ! I am mistress here, and you shall obey me !”

“ But, Mrs. Graham, I am your friend,” replied Bertha, appalled at the sight. “ I only desire to aid you. I am afraid to leave you, for I fear that you will lose your mind.”

“ Friend !—yes, a most valuable friend !” sneered Mrs. Graham, with bitter emphasis. “ You come here and live on my charity for years—a most valuable friend indeed !” and she laughed a low, unearthly laugh, that made Bertha tremble. “ Begone, you beggar ! I am done with you. I have no farther use for you or your simpering ways. The very sight of you is loathsome to me. Do you hear me ?—Begone !”

“ But, Mrs. Graham, where can I go ?” said Bertha, in despair.

“ I do not know or care !” said Mrs. Graham, fiercely. “ Get out of my house, and never enter it again !”

## CHAPTER XXI.

### WHAT IS THE LAW GOOD FOR ?

When Arthur left Mrs. Graham he was impressed with the certainty that she would not long remain inactive; and to him, as the days passed, her long silence seemed portentous of evil. But while he was yet in doubt as to what her next move would be, he was favored with a very long letter from Webster, in which he was politely requested to see Mrs. Graham and pay her the money he had collected.

“Aha !” thought Arthur, “I guess they see the point, and begin to realize that the law protects Edith, to a slight extent, at least. I will answer the letter, however, and give the old gentleman an intimation of how I regard his actions in this matter.” And sitting down, Arthur wrote :  
“DEAR UNCLE WEBSTER :

“I have just received your letter requesting me to pay Mrs. Graham the money I have collected, and in reply I must say that for several reasons I cannot comply with your request. My wife, though seemingly ignored in all your calculations, is entitled to a portion of her father’s estate. Her lawyer says she is entitled to a proportionate part of all the rents from the property, and advises her to demand her share. Acting upon this advice, I have turned over to her all that I have collected, and therefore I have no money for which I should account to Mrs. Graham ;

and even if I had, I seriously doubt the propriety of Mrs. Graham receiving all of this money, for I have twice been solicited to join with her in a scheme by which not only yourself but all the other relatives were to be robbed of by far the largest part of their share in the estate. This would of itself make me certain of her dishonesty, even though she had not already taken the amount of the widow's award in excess of what rightfully belongs to her.

"Now, I write this with a full understanding that this attempted robbery is too vile in its character for you to believe her capable of considering, much less urging upon me ; and yet, if you will give me the opportunity, I will prove its truth beyond a question by Mr. Blood, to whom Mr. Skinner unfolded the scheme, never doubting for a moment that I would not accept. Now, I ask you, in all earnestness, if it is not your duty to investigate this matter, in order that you may the more thoroughly guard the interests of yourself, as well as those whom you were expected to protect.

"In making this charge, I fully realize the feeling of disgust that takes hold upon a man when a woman is thus spoken of. I take this responsibility and risk of being misunderstood, and hurl these charges at you in the hope that their very hideousness may so far awaken you to a proper sense of your duty as to make you investigate them; and if I fail to prove their truth, then give this letter to the world as my just punishment. Can I say more ? Can I do more to awaken you from this deathlike stupor into which your perfect confidence in Mrs. Graham's integrity has placed you ? Will you not hold out a helping hand to those to whom your brother left you as guardian and protector, or will you still maintain this stolid indifference to your duty and continue to support and aid this woman ? Your answer will be awaited with much anxiety by,

"Yours sincerely,

"ARTHUR HOWARD."



As might have been expected, Arthur, a few days afterward, received this characteristic letter, addressed to—

“MY DEAR NEPHEW :

“I have only to say that you have been unfortunate in seeing things in a wrong light, and as far as personalities relating to others are concerned, I have nothing to say. Some of your charges are so glaringly inconsistent as to be unworthy of the attention of any sane man, and if your aim was to prejudice me against the person you so greatly malign, I can only say that you have most signally failed. When a man lets his temper get the upper hand of him, I always pity him. I am not disposed to enter into any angry discussion of points which we do not see alike. Your suspicions are of too low a character for me to indulge in, and asking that you will please excuse the plainness of this letter, I remain,

“Your very bad

“UNCLE WEBSTER.”

“Well, that settles one more hope,” thought Arthur, as he finished reading the letter. “I wonder what this lump of goodly imbecility would call the thing itself, if the suspicions are of too low a character. He sits in his farmhouse, the wickedest thing around him being the robin who steals his cherries, and descants upon the high and low character of suspicions, while, in fact, he has as little knowledge of the material of which the successful imitation of a society lady is made, as old dog Tray had of city politics. I can plainly see that there is no hope for help from him, for Mrs. Graham holds undisputed possession.”

“I should like to know what the law is good for, Mr. Blood, if it allows Mrs. Graham to steal from the estate with perfect impunity, and then charge Edith with doing it all ?”

Arthur had entered Mr. Blood's office, and with a thoughtful and worried expression on his face taken a seat close by the attorney, who always seemed ready to lay aside his work that he might be entertained by Arthur's ardent words and vehement denunciation of Mrs. Graham's course. To him it was rest and recreation ; and though he often laughed at the crudity and unshapeliness of his ideas, he enjoyed the moments spent in conversation with him ; and as Arthur continued, he sat watching him with a quizzical, good-natured smile, that plainly showed his enjoyment of the scene.

"The law is wrong somewhere, Mr. Blood," said Arthur, earnestly ; for you know as well as I that she is not entitled to this award, and yet you tell me, and every one else that I have talked to says, that we cannot prevent this robbery. Why is it ?"

"You are an impulsive fellow and no mistake," said Mr. Blood, admiringly ; "but with all your energy and pluck you have no hope of defeating Mrs. Graham in her attempt to take her award. The law gives it to her, and you cannot help yourself. It would please me to be able to tell you differently, but as this is the case, I cannot."

"But father Graham's will says she must take what he gives her in place of all these claims ; how, then, can she take what he expressly says she shall not ?" inquired Arthur, bitterly.

"If she respected his wishes, Arthur, she would not desire to take this award ; but you are not dealing with that kind of a woman. O, no, she loves money far too well for that."

"But does the law have no power where she decides to

take more than is hers ?” inquired Arthur, in amazement.

“None whatever,” replied Mr. Blood, positively. “The plain words of the statute are, that whether a man dies with or without a will, his widow shall have her award. This is one of the oldest of our statutes, and comes down unaltered from the old English laws, which are really the foundation of our own; and this word ‘shall’ admits of no misunderstanding, and is mandatory—there is no getting around it. Now, I tell you this with the hope that you will fully realize the uselessness of spending more time and thought upon this matter; and while no one feels more keenly than I the injustice that it has wrought, I must advise you to give up all hope of changing it, or preventing Mrs. Graham from taking this award.”

“But what is the use of making a will ?” persisted Arthur.

“Well, this is one of the peculiarities of the law,” replied Mr. Blood, smiling at Arthur’s perplexity. “But come, now, Arthur, it is of no use to worry over it; you may as well give it up now as later; for you can do nothing to prevent this robbery.

“It seems strange,” said Arthur, musingly, “very strange; for here is a clear case of theft, and yet there is no law to prevent it, while you tell me that the law sanctions it. Mr. Blood, I have always been taught to respect the law; I have been taught that the law protected the honest citizen and punished injustice and crime; that while in some cases the penalty seemed too severe, it was for the common good, so that all might be forced to obey its commands. Now this beautiful theory comes tumbling about my head like a house of cards, when

you tell me that it not only allows this woman to commit this robbery but aids and supports her in so doing, while the woman or child who steals to keep from starving is crushed under the weight of its condemnation. I demand of you why this is. We both know that the charge has often been made that lawyers connive at wrongs in order that they may the more readily fill their pockets with ill-gotten gold, and I ask you if here is not a case that gives the people good reason for believing such statements to be true?"

"I can only say," replied Mr. Blood, "that I am not responsible for the laws."

"If you are not, your brother lawyers are," replied Arthur, quickly; "for no calling has a greater number represented in our legislatures, and to their opinions of new laws and to their decisions all others give a ready assent."

"But I was only speaking of myself," replied Mr. Blood, with an amused smile; "and so far as I know, it has been the custom for years, and is the regular order of the court, to set aside an award for the widow whenever she asks for it, and this, too, regardless of the will."

"And does the court then proceed to carry out the other provisions of the will?" inquired Arthur.

"O, certainly; just the same as if the widow had made no claims for her award."

"But if the court goes this far," said Arthur, bitterly, "why should it hesitate about giving the widow dower and homestead, and then, if there is anything left, give her what the will provides for her?"

“O, that is only done when the widow decides that she will not abide by the will,” quickly replied Mr. Blood.

“And how do you know but what Mrs. Graham has decided that she will not abide by the other provisions of the will?” inquired Arthur, earnestly. “Suppose she decides she will take her dower, what then?”

“O, she cannot do that now,” replied Mr. Blood, “for more than a year has passed since the will was probated, and she must renounce the will within a year or else abide by its provisions.”

“Well, I should say she had renounced the will; what more could she do?” persisted Arthur.

“You would not make a bad lawyer yourself, Arthur,” said Mr. Blood, laughing. “You would be strong on the cross-questioning, though I fear your arguments would not stand.”

“But that does not answer my question,” replied Arthur, determined to fully understand the matter. “What I want to know is, if Mrs. Graham has not renounced the will by taking this award?”

“O, no, my dear fellow, not at all,” quickly replied Mr. Blood. “The law requires that her renunciation shall be in writing, and filed within one year, or not at all.”

“And what would have happened if she had made a written renunciation of the will?” inquired Arthur.

“In that case the court would give her an award, and, during her life, give her a dower right to one-third of the property, after which it would revert to Edith; or, in place of this life interest in one-third of the property, we could have its value appraised and paid to her in money.”

“And what would be the amount she would receive under these circumstances?” inquired Arthur.

“I cannot say, exactly,” replied Mr. Blood, thoughtfully, “but I think it would be only about a fourth of what the will gives her.”

“If that is so, you do not believe she ever intended to renounce the will, do you?”

“Not if she is well informed in regard to her position, and I judge she is,” replied Mr. Blood, confidently.

“But do you not think that she intended to take all the law gives her,” inquired Arthur, “and then take all that the will gives her besides?”

“I have no doubt of it.”

“And you think that the law is with her in doing so?” questioned Arthur.

“Yes,” replied Mr. Blood, “to the extend of her award, I do.”

“Well, I don’t,” said Arthur, positively. “A moment ago you said that my arguments were not good; now I am going to give you the law as it appears to me, and it may help you to see things as I do.”

“Well, take the floor and make your speech,” said Mr. Blood, as with a laugh, he threw his feet upon his desk and leaned back in his chair. “I am resigned to my fate.”

“This positive giving of this award to the widow,” began Arthur, his thoughts all concentrated on the one theme, “is, to my mind, applicable only to those cases where the will does not provide for or give an equivalent.”

“O, but that is not law,” interrupted Mr. Blood.

“I am not talking law,” retorted Arthur, “I am talking common sense.”

“Well, that’s foreign to the subject,” smilingly replied Mr. Blood ; “but go ahead.”

“Where there is no will,” continued Arthur, “we both agree that the widow should have her award. In cases where there is a will, she is still entitled to her award if she desires it, but when she takes her award she must give up the will ; for I will not believe that the law intends or countenances such an outrage as allowing a widow to choose all that is good under the law and then allow her to take all that is good under the will. The law protects her against an unjust will, but she must decide between the two ; and, having decided, she can take only what the law gives her, and nothing by the will, or what the will gives her, and nothing by the law ; but she cannot take both ways.”

Mr. Blood’s feet had dropped from his desk, and he had stealthily crept forward, as if fearful that he might not hear every word, until his face was directly under Arthur’s, as he stood calmly but earnestly expressing the conclusions of months of hard and aggravating thought upon this all-absorbing subject.

“Say that again, Arthur,” said Mr. Blood, quickly—“say it again ; you may be right.”

“She must decide between the two,” replied Arthur, almost fiercely ; “and having decided which one she will accept, she can take only what it gives.”

When Arthur ceased speaking, Mr. Blood leaned back in his chair, his eyes downcast—busy with his thoughts.

Arthur too much feared a hasty decision to be anxious for a quick reply, and quietly waited as the old lawyer wrestled with the knotty problem. At last Mr. Blood



aroused himself, and said : " There may be more in what you have said, Arthur, than you imagine ; but leave me to think it over, and I will tell you my decision."

Arthur was much surprised when he returned to his store to find Mr. Skinner awaiting his arrival.

" I came," said Mr. Skinner, with great apparent friendliness, " to see if I could not induce you to change your purpose in regard to your refusal to pay Mrs. Graham this money, for it will cause all of us much unnecessary worry and expense if we cannot come to some just understanding in the matter."

" And what do you expect me to do ?" curtly inquired Arthur.

" Well, if you would pay this money to Mrs. Graham, that is about all that we could ask," replied Mr. Skinner, hesitatingly.

" And why should I give Edith's money to Mrs. Graham?" inquired Arthur.

" So that she can pay the expenses of the estate," confidently replied Mr. Skinner.

" I will see that they are paid on this part of the property," replied Arthur, decisively, " and Mrs. Graham can pay the other portion."

" But she does not get enough to pay all the expenses, Arthur, and she must have this."

" She gets more than enough to pay all legitimate expenses," replied Arthur, firmly, " and if she desires to hire lawyers to help her steal, she can pay for their services as best she can, but Edith will not give her money for any such dishonorable purpose."

"You speak of this money as if it already belonged to your wife," said Mr. Skinner, carefully feeling his way.

"And if you are anything of a lawyer, you know that such is the case," quickly replied Arthur.

"Yes, in one sense, it does," replied Mr. Skinner ; "but Mrs. Graham is responsible for it, and she should receive it, and in the final settlement she will give it to your wife."

"No, thank you, Mr. Skinner, we have got our hands upon it now and feel sure of that much, at least ; and I hardly need tell you that we have not the most implicit faith in the honesty of either Mrs. Graham or her attorney," and Arthur turned upon his heel and was about to leave him, when Mr. Skinner placed his hand upon his arm, and detaining him, said :

"Would you be pleased to see this estate remain unsettled for years, and Edith kept from enjoying her share of it ?"

"No, I would not," replied Arthur, positively.

"Well, that is just what will happen if you do not pay her this money," said Mr. Skinner, impressively.

"Not with my consent," said Arthur, determinedly.

"You can't help yourself, for Mrs. Graham has it in her power to do this, and assures me that she will unless you turn over this money at once."

"I shall do all that I can to prevent it, and if I cannot, then we will abide the consequences," said Arthur, firmly.

"You are very unwise," replied Mr. Skinner, "for you compel Mrs. Graham to resort to very severe measures ; and if she once determines to injure you, she is in a position to make you feel it."

“You can tell Mrs. Graham that for once, at least, she has encountered a will as strong and firm as her own, and that her threats do not alarm nor her friendship flatter me,” replied Arthur, as he coolly turned and left the attorney.

## CHAPTER XXII.

THEN YOU MUST TAKE THE CONSEQUENCES.

“The line of thought that your words started,” began Mr. Blood, as Arthur seated himself in his office, “has led me to see very clearly that Mrs. Graham has made a terrible mistake in claiming this award, and I would advise you to file a bill demanding the division of this estate, and setting forth the facts of her taking this award, and that she has taken it in opposition to the expressed desire of her husband, and therefore, as she has broken her husband’s will, she is only entitled to her dower and can take only what the law gives her ; that, as she has no interest in the will, she must now no longer obstruct the partition of the estate. This will result in a serious loss to her, or I am greatly mistaken.”

“And will she have to give up her award ?” inquired Arthur, delighted at the prospect.

“Either that or lose much more.”

“And are you certain that one of these two will be the result ?”

“As certain as I can be,” confidently replied Mr. Blood.

“And the tide has really turned,” said Arthur, almost inaudibly. “Can it be ?”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Blood, “it has been a long struggle, Arthur, but victory is surely yours. But come, this is no time for reveries, now is the time to act; shall I prepare the papers?”

“I hardly know,” replied Arthur, lost in contemplation of his long and bitter contest now so suddenly crowned with promises of success—“I hardly know what to say. She is a woman; and while I admit that I would have no objection to seeing her lose it all, as a just punishment for the pain and suffering she has caused Edith, I must take no unfair advantage of her in any way, for if I did there would always be those who would cry shame.”

“That is very pretty in theory, Arthur, but unfortunately we are dealing with a very practical woman in a very practical world. She would not hesitate were she in your place, and why should you?”

“Because she is a woman,” said Arthur; “and though no one would censure her if she used every means in her power to gain an advantage over me, I must deal fairly with her.”

“O, a poor, defenseless widow! Ha! ha!” chuckled Mr. Blood. “But, Arthur, it seems to me that she makes a foeman worthy of your steel.”

“Yes, she would make me bite the dust if she only had the power,” said Arthur, bitterly, “and that, too, without a pang of remorse; but if I were to retaliate, I would lay myself liable to the charge of cruelly oppressing the defenseless.”

“O, come, now, Arthur, you must throw off these feelings,” said Mr. Blood, appealingly. “I am anxious to get at that Skinner and teach him some points of law that he

does not know, and we'll do it, too, before we are through with him—eh, Arthur !”

“I trust so,” doubtfully replied Arthur ; “but before we begin I must give Mrs. Graham one more opportunity to relinquish this award.”

“Well, I think you waste your powder, that’s all,” retorted Mr. Blood, who, it was plain to see, was now sanguine of success and eager for the fray.

“I shall see her and give her this last chance,” said Arthur, determinedly, “and then if she does not consent you may punish her to the full extent of the law. Then if the world objects, I can at least feel that I am not at fault,” and leaving Mr. Blood he found his way to Mrs. Graham’s home, entering which, he quietly awaited her appearance.

Sitting there, he could not fail to recognize many familiar objects that recalled to his mind associations that made him feel a sadness that oppressed him ; and as he looked back over the many changes that had taken place since first he entered those doors, it seemed that in that short time he had met with the experiences of a long lifetime, in which joy and sorrow, grief and care, were strangely blended. Mrs. Graham’s appearance was all that was needed to complete the contrast between her as he saw her now and as she first appeared to him when she so kindly met him at the door.

“I came,” began Arthur, abruptly, “to ask you some very pointed but most important questions ; you can answer them or not, as you desire.”

“I am, as I always have been, entirely at your service when I can aid you,” replied Mrs. Graham, with a stately inclining of her head.

Apparently without noticing her manner or words, Arthur continued : "I am desirous of knowing exactly how you consider this award that you have taken—is it your intention to take it as a loan, and in the final settlement have it deducted from your share of the estate?"

All the force and hatred of Mrs. Graham's nature seemed concentrated in the look that she turned upon Arthur, as for a moment she fiercely glared at him, and then, firmly compressing her lips, answered :

"Under no circumstances."

"Do you believe that father Graham intended that you should take more than he gave you in the will?"

"That makes no difference," declared Mrs. Graham, passionately ; the law gives it to me and I will have it!"

"Do you intend to take this award in excess of what the will gives you?"

"I do!"

"Then, Mrs. Graham, you must take the consequences," said Arthur, resolutely. "I will bid you good-day."

Had Arthur shown more concern in her replies, or urged her to change her course, Mrs. Graham would more easily have understood his purpose, and his last words would not have carried so ominous a meaning. As it was, she found herself after his departure in a most uncomfortable frame of mind. "If he intends this as a threat," muttered Mrs. Graham, when the door closed upon him, "he may well be mysterious and fear my wrath, for I still hold possession of the property and to me he must come at last ; and even though I wreck the whole estate, he shall come. But no, it hardly seemed like threatening, he was



too sad for that. And, bye the bye, he is showing the effect of all this care and worry. Fool that he is, why does he rebel—why could he not have told me more of his plans? O, I feel an uneasiness that I cannot dispel. I am sure he means to do me some harm, and I must watch him more closely from now to the end.”

“You may draw up the papers, Mr. Blood,” said Arthur, as he entered his office and wearily seated himself. “I have seen her, and she leaves no doubt in my mind of her intentions.”

“Just as I thought,” replied Mr. Blood, sententiously. “You will have to conquer her before you will have peace.”

“I am afraid there will be more pieces than peace,” replied Arthur.

Mr. Blood carefully prepared the papers, and after filing them in court quietly awaited their effect upon the enemy.

When Mr. Skinner saw them, he hastily summoned Mrs. Graham, and motioning her to a seat, said :

“I find that Mr. Blood is making a desperate effort to defeat you in the courts. He has just filed a bill in which it is claimed that you have rejected the will, and now can take only what the law gives you.”

“But I have not rejected the will,” said Mrs. Graham, indignantly. “I am perfectly willing to take what the will gives me, and always have been.”

“O, you need feel no worry about it,” hastily replied Mr. Skinner. “I only wanted to know if I should defend the suit.”

“Certainly. You must not only defend it, but you must defeat them, if you can.”

“O, it will be no trouble to do that,” replied Mr. Skinner, confidently; “they cannot possibly succeed.”

“But this is what you said when they opposed my taking the award,” persisted Mrs. Graham; “but notwithstanding your assurances, they did defeat us, at least in part, and your only excuse has been that you did not anticipate so strong an opposition. I feel certain that Arthur has not consented to begin this suit until he was fully assured that he had some hope for success; and this explains his firmness and seeming confidence when he called at my house and asked me if I intended to give up my award, and when I told him that I did not, he said that I must take the consequences.”

“O, that was only an idle threat, Mrs. Graham. You need have no fear of anything that he can do.”

“No, it was not a threat,” replied Mrs. Graham, positively. “I was inclined to think so at first, but I now believe it to have been a last effort to induce me to give up this award before he began this suit.”

“Well, they die hard,” said Mr. Skinner, musingly, “but they will have to come to it in the end.”

Notwithstanding Mr. Skinner’s assurances of safety were oft repeated, they failed to convince her; and Mrs. Graham’s sense of guilt and knowledge that the charges made against her were only too true, made her fear the result, and she vainly sought for some evidence upon which she might depend.

“I am far from being convinced,” said Mrs. Graham, despondingly. “It seems to me that we are in great danger.”

"Let me show you the law on this point," said Mr. Skinner, "for it is very plain, and will no doubt quiet your fears. There it is," and Mr. Skinner handed her the volume, and with his finger indicated the important clause.

"That seems plain enough," replied Mrs. Graham, as she closed the book and laid it upon the desk: "but don't you think I had better give up this award and not run this risk?"

"It would only show that you were fearful of the result," said Mr. Skinner, petulantly, "and could do no possible good. I tell you that there is no chance for his succeeding, and you might as well keep all you have as to give it up now."

"I would not consent to give it up if I felt certain he could not succeed," replied Mrs. Graham, earnestly.

"Well, I advise you to keep it, that's all," said Mr. Skinner, provoked at her unbelief.

"If we have reason to be so sure of success, what can Arthur hope to gain?" inquired Mrs. Graham, anxiously.

"He is playing for a big stake this time, Mrs. Graham," replied Mr. Skinner, impressively. "It will be no child's play for either of us, but the result is assured before we begin."

"But if he should succeed, what benefit would he derive from all this care and expense?" urged Mrs. Graham.

"But he cannot succeed—there is no chance for him. The law is clearly and distinctly against him, and he has not the shadow of a chance upon which to build a hope."

"But if he should," persisted Mrs. Graham, "what could he gain?"

“If by any possibility he should defeat you, you would not get enough to be worth fighting for,” replied Mr. Skinner, impressively. “But, Mrs. Graham, you need have no fear of that.”

But Mrs. Graham did fear it, and many were the times when, lost in contemplation of what the future might have in store for her, she writhed in agony at the thought.

Had she been able to grasp the invisible foe and test his strength, she would not have faltered for a moment; but the calm, firm resistance that she was being met with was maddening.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### FOILED.

Mrs. Granam had dallied with the law as a child plays with fire—charmed by its brilliancy and power. Never having experienced the pain that it was able to inflict, she was fearless in its handling, until in terror she now saw the harmless plaything spring suddenly into a raging conflagration that threatened to destroy her hopes and turn them into ashes of agonizing despair. Far too shrewd a woman of the world was she to idly fold her hands in imagined safety while a doubt remained as to the security of her position. Though oft repeated, Mr. Skinner's assurances of victory could not remove her doubts. The very thought that Arthur might be able to defeat her, and all that she had planned these many years to possess might be swept from her sight and beyond all hope of recovery, was torture to her mind ; and in the short time between the filing of the papers and the day for hearing of the case in court, Mrs. Graham almost experienced the tortures of the damned ; and as Arthur, filled with anxiety and doubt for the result, entered the court room, he could not fail to notice the change in her appearance. But if he hoped that she would be easily conquered, he was destined to meet with disap-

pointment ; for as privation makes the lean and hungry tigress ten-fold more ferocious, so Mrs. Graham's hatred had only been intensified during these days of anxiety and doubt. But during all these days she had never once thought of yielding ; had she done so, no doubt she would have spurned the thought almost before it gathered form. No, the same unpitying hand that he would feel if she were victor, would be as firmly put forth to stay her from supplicating mercy or making an appeal for aid. This Arthur quickly realized as he recognized the quick, penetrating glance of defiant hatred with which her eyes met his as he seated himself near Mr. Blood.

Mr. Skinner laughed and chatted with the attorneys who were near him, and was so confident of success as to be entirely indifferent to the importance of the case ; while Mr. Blood sat with thoughtful brow, silent and alone. But the entrance of the court quickly aroused him, and when Mr. Skinner arose, he was on the alert to catch and carefully weigh every word he uttered.

“ In this case,” began Mr. Skinner, airily, “ the plaintiff, Edith Howard, feels aggrieved because the widow of Stewart Graham has taken her award, and files this bill for the purpose of obtaining the decision of the court as to the widow's title to it. This is an expensive and very troublesome way of settling a trivial question, that could easily have been decided if she had sought good counsel and advice, and would not have taken the valuable time of the court for its hearing. I am surprised that her attorney should allow her to take this course, or consent to draw or file so nonsensical a bill as this that is now presented for your consid-

eration. I can only account for it by supposing that he is not acquainted with or does not comprehend that well-known statute that we naturally expect the merest tyro in law to be fully conversant with, and for his information I will read it as it is found in the revised statutes, chapter 3, page 113, and paragraph 74: 'Whether her husband died testate or intestate, the widow shall in all cases, in exclusion of debts, legacies and bequests, be allowed the following described property \* \* \* as her sole and exclusive property forever, which shall be known as the widow's award.'

"Now, your Honor, until this statute is repealed or modified, I can see no reason why I should take the time and attention of the court in advancing arguments in favor of the widow's right to her award, and I feel called upon to demand that this case be thrown out of court as too trivial and childish in its character to merit your attention, and that this widow shall be relieved from the necessity of a further defense of her right to take her award."

The uneasiness manifested by the court gave certain evidence that he was wearied by the prospect of having to listen to Mr. Blood's arguments upon a point of law concerning which his decision had already been made, and impatient at the thought that such well recognized rulings should again be brought in question. Against such odds Mr. Blood's arguments seemed certain to be unavailing.

As Mr. Skinner seated himself with a satisfied air, Mr. Blood arose with the quiet composure of the old and well-seasoned veteran who, sure of his position, willingly abides his time, and addressing the Judge, said: "With all that



the attorney who represents the defendant has said in regard to the law that bears upon this case I fully agree. I would not take one argument away from those presented by him. But while he has left them half formed and uncertain in their bearing, I desire to carry them to their logical conclusion, and show to the court that for years the decisions on this point have been one-sided and very unjust. Let us in this case view both sides of the matter and see if we cannot come to a more just decision. The opposing attorney states his case, which in substance is, that with or without a will the widow shall have her award. All right ; we agree to that ; and now say that in this case if, after weighing the value of what the will gives her, she finds that it does not suit her and decides to take this award, she can only do so by giving up the will and accepting what the law gives her. This is her privilege, and is what is intended by the statute when it says, in effect, that an unjust will shall not deprive her of her award. But the justice that protects her against an unjust will also protects the daughter against an unjust and grasping widow ; and while a widow cannot be forced to give up her award, she is forced to decide which she will accept ; for it is not her right to take so much under the law as is to her advantage and at the same time take all that the will gives her. If she accepts the will of her husband she must abide by its conditions ; and as this widow by taking her award has refused to accept the will, it operates as a bar to her acceptance of any part of it. Therefore, so far as Sarah J. Graham is concerned, she has no interest in the will, and is not in a position to farther obstruct or delay a partition of the property. This,

your Honor, is law, and that, too, the very best, for it is supported by all that is just and right.

The court had lost his uneasiness, and was now earnestly attentive. He was evidently hearing something new and strange, as he leaned forward eagerly devouring every word as it fell with clear, deliberate intonations from the lips of Mr. Blood.

Mr. Skinner presented a pitiable picture as he sat in a state of doubt and uncertainty, while Mr. Blood, seemingly grown in stature, towered above him like an avenging conqueror, as he thundered forth his powerful arguments. And it was apparent that Mr. Blood fully realized the exalted position to which he had attained, where he was not alone the victor, but the instructor of the Judge upon the bench ; and as he sank into his seat and received the congratulations of his brother attorneys who had happily been detained, his eyes shone with the intensity of his realization of his great victory.

After some moments spent in silent deliberation, the Judge arose, saying : “ I am satisfied that a widow must decide which course she will pursue, whether to abide by the will and give up all that she would otherwise receive by law, or give up the will and receive what the law says shall be hers. This I am satisfied is good law and perfectly just. Its application to this case must be that, as the widow has already taken under the law, she must abide by the result and give up all the benefits of the will. This is my decision.”

“ But, your Honor,” said Mr. Skinner, jumping to his feet, excitedly, “ do you realize the terrible penalty this

would inflict upon my client, and this, too, when she has done no more than every other person placed in the same position has done, and all in strict conformity to the rulings of our courts for hundreds of years ?”

“ I hesitated,” replied the Judge, “ on only that one point. I know this decision is the first of its kind, and I hesitated to inflict this punishment, fearing that it might be unjust ; but now it is clear to my mind that the widow fully understood the wishes of her husband as expressed in his will when he inserted the clause, ‘ in lieu of all claims that she may or might have in and to my estate ;’ and if with this understanding she decided to take her award in excess of what the will gave her, simply because she believed the law gave it to her, she must not now complain if the law takes its course.”

“ Will the court enter an order that the estate be divided in accordance with this decision, and the daughter be placed in possession of her property ?” inquired Mr. Blood, as calmly as if the victory had been less complete.

“ Yes, the court will so direct.”

Mr. Blood, with a satisfied smile, gathered his papers together, and with Arthur silently left the room, while Mr. Skinner, sorrowfully turning to Mrs. Graham, said :

“ We are beaten ; our plans have utterly failed.”

For a moment Mrs. Graham made no reply ; she was too nearly overcome by the force of the blow, though not entirely unprepared. The wound had been too deeply cut, the pain too sharp and keen, for her to feel resentment or anger. After a rapid glance at the changes that the decision would make with her, she turned to Mr. Skinner and mournfully said :

"It is all because Edith employed a lawyer. If she had not done that, we would have been safe."

"Yes," replied Mr. Skinner, "we have been FOILED BY A LAWYER!"

"I wish now that I had never taken that award," said Mrs. Graham, sadly, "it has cost me too dearly."

"It would have saved you from this defeat," said Mr. Skinner. "But no one ever thought of interpreting the law in the way that Mr. Blood has done, and I feel that the judge would have decided in our favor if it had not been for that. But it seems to be unjust that you should be the one upon whom the whole force of the law should fall with such crushing weight."

"Yes," sorrowfully replied Mrs. Graham, "I seem to be the one who must always suffer for the errors that others have committed."

When Arthur stepped from the court room into the sunshine of the open day, he began to realize the completeness and certainty of his victory, and felt the quiet joy stealing over him that one must feel who is suddenly liberated from a dark and dismal prison cell and again feels the pleasure of being free. But his anxiety had been too great for him to outwardly express his joy, as with a light heart he sought Edith, to whom, as she opened the door, he said:

"We are the victors, Edith, and the contest is over."

"Are we entirely free from Mrs. Graham?" inquired Edith, hardly able as yet to believe the truth.

"Yes," replied Arthur, joyfully, "we are completely separated from her, and she can dictate terms to us no longer. For as Mr. Blood said she would, she has grasped more than she could retain, and has paid the penalty."

"She must have found that she was accountable to more than her God and the judge," said Edith, laughing.

"Yes, and she has learned a good many lessons since she made that foolish boast. And now, Edith, since we are so far separated from her let us make it complete, and let her drop out of our life and thoughts."

"And never speak her name again," added Edith.

"Yes, that is a good suggestion," said Arthur. "We will never speak her name again."

"Never!" said Edith, firmly.

And in a short time after their last contest in court Arthur had the pleasure of seeing Edith in possession of her property, and completely and forever separated from the evil influence that had followed her during the many years since Mrs. Graham's first appearance in her home.

To them Mrs. Graham was now as if she had never been,—the blotting of her name and memory from out their lives was complete. A fitting end for such a life.

Arthur and Edith had seen too much of the hollow mockery of so-called friendships that are founded upon the unstable and insecure foundation of selfishness and worldly pride, and willingly passed over that dark chasm that often makes us falter and grow pale as we contemplate its hollow depths. The experiences they had met with carried them above and beyond its influence, leaving them well content in the possession of the friendship of those who had proved themselves true friends in their time of need. These friends were kept in fond remembrance by them through all the many years of quiet, peaceful happiness that followed.

Mrs. Graham left the court room entirely overcome by the

completeness of her overthrow. To her the world seemed dark and cheerless now, and all her plans seemed hopelessly crushed by the decision of the court. She grew distrustful of even her closest friends, as silent and alone she sat in her desolate home and contemplated the wreck that lay about her.

What were friends to her now, since that which she loved more than they was lost to her forever ! What comfort in the thought that Edith's life had been made miserable by reason of her acts, now that Edith was enjoying the fruits of her folly ! What comfort could she derive from the thought that the relatives had always supported her in all that she did, now that she had lost all !

Though beaten, foiled and desperate, Mrs. Graham had one hope left. The property belonging to the relatives still remained in her charge, for her, as executrix, to apportion ; and now that Arthur's prying eyes were removed, she felt secure in carrying out her long deferred plan of robbery ; and turning upon their portion, she, with Mr. Skinner's aid, was at last successful in taking from them by far the largest part of that which had been left them by the will, so that when aunt Lucy received the portion allotted to her by Mrs. Graham, its diminished proportions made her wonder that so much strife and trouble had taken place over so small an estate ; and though Webster received much less than was his due, his confidence in Mrs. Graham remained unshaken.

Though still angered at her defeat and the loss of her share of the estate, Mrs. Graham now felt that she had gained her full proportion, as, in truth, she had. But in

her attempts to take what belonged to others, she had found it necessary to gather about her those counsellors who, having no scruples against advising her to acts of robbery, did not hesitate to turn upon her and make her the victim of their greed ; so that one misfortune quickly following another, it was not long before she saw by far the larger portion of her ill-gotten wealth sink and disappear, until in the commercial crisis that shortly afterward swept the length and breadth of the land, her strained and weather-beaten craft went down with many a nobler one for company, and she was left a shipwrecked mariner on the financial seas, deserted by those she had counted as her friends ; until, with old age creeping on apace, desolate and alone—

“One sole desire, one passion now remains

To keep life's fever still within her veins,

Vengeance! dire vengeance on the wretch who cast

O'er her and all she loved that ruinous blast.

For this she still lives on, careless of all

The wreaths that glory on his paths lets fall,

For this alone exists—like lightning's fire,

To speed one bolt of vengeance and expire.”

—MOORE.









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